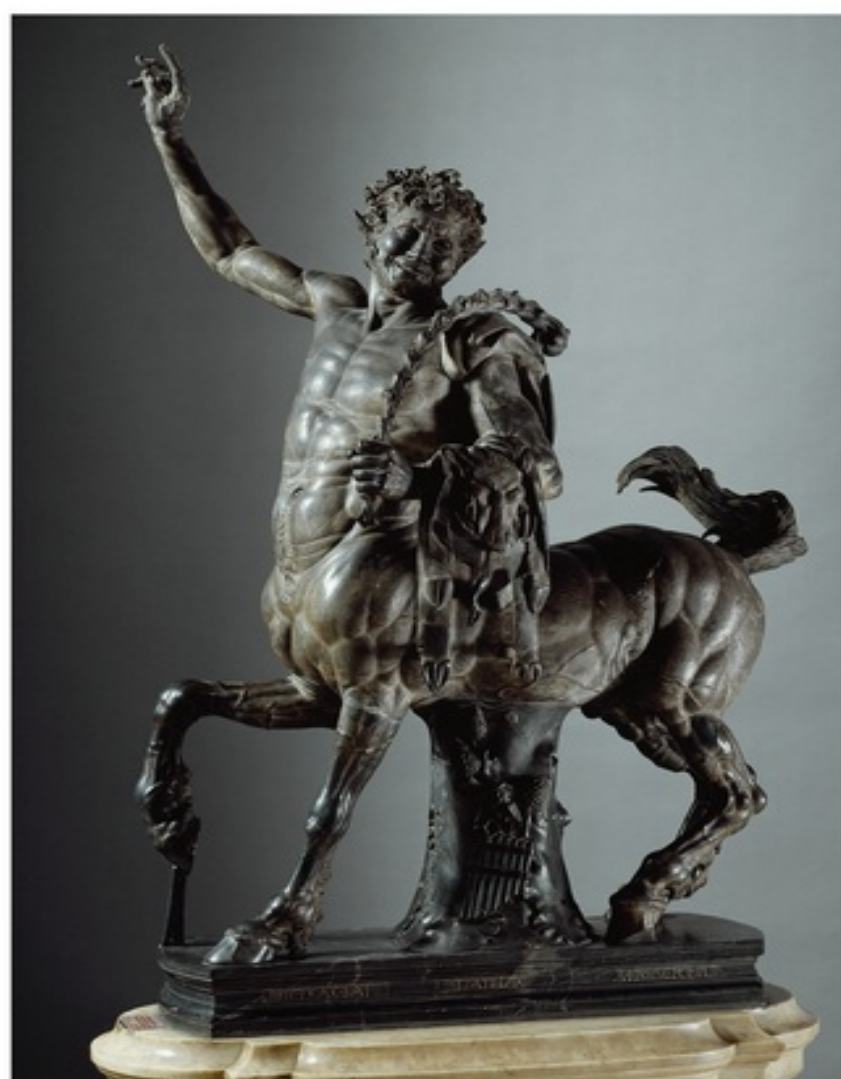


BLACKWELL COMPANIONS TO THE ANCIENT WORLD

A COMPANION TO
ROMAN ART

EDITED BY BARBARA E. BORG



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Notes on Contributors

Mont Allen is Assistant Professor of Classics and Art History at Southern Illinois University. A specialist in mythological images, funerary culture, and the intersection of technique and meaning in Greek and Roman art, he has received awards from the DAAD and the Woodrow Wilson Foundation, and is currently preparing a monograph on the extinction of mythic imagery on Roman sarcophagi of the third century.

Stefan Altekamp is Reader in Classical Archaeology at the Winckelmann-Institut, Humboldt-University at Berlin. He is the author of *Zu griechischer Architekturornamentik im sechsten und fünften Jahrhundert v.Chr.* (1991), and *Rückkehr nach Afrika: Italienische Kolonialarchäologie in Libyen 1911–1943* (2000). He is also co-editor of *Posthumanistische Klassische Archäologie* (2001), and *Die Aktualität des Archäologischen in Wissenschaft, Medien und Künsten* (2004).

Rosemary J. Barrow is a Reader in Classical Art and Reception at the University of Roehampton. Besides articles on art history and the classical tradition, she has published two books on Victorian classical reception: *Lawrence Alma-Tadema* (2001) and *The Use of Classical Art and Literature by Victorian Painters* (2007). Her latest publication is a co-authored book entitled *The Classical Tradition: Art, Literature, Thought* with Michael Silk (KCL) and Ingo Gildenhard (Cambridge). Her next solo project is a monograph on ancient sculpture for Cambridge University Press.

Barbara E. Borg is Professor of Classical Archaeology at the University of Exeter. She has published widely on Greek and Roman art and archaeology. Her books include *Mumienporträts: Chronologie und Kontext* (1999), *Der Logos des Mythos – Allegorien und Personifikationen in der frühen griechischen Kunst* (2002), *Crisis and Ambition: Tombs and Burial Customs in Third-Century CE Rome* (2013), and the edited volume *Paideia: The World of the Second Sophistic* (2004). She is the recipient of a number of awards and prizes, including a Getty Research Fellowship, a Senior Onassis Fellowship, the Hugh Last Fellowship at the British School at Rome, and a Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship to write a micro-history of a small part of the Roman *suburbium* from the first century BCE to the fourth century CE.

Alessandra Bravi is a researcher at the University of Perugia and Privatdozentin in Classical Archaeology at the Ruprecht-Karls-Universität in Heidelberg. She is the author of two monographs, *Ornamenta Urbis: Opere d'arte greche negli spazi romani* (2012), and *Griechische Kunstwerke im politischen Leben Roms und Konstantinopel* (2014). She has edited the *Catalogue Aurea Umbria: Una regione dell'impero nell'era di Costantino* (2012). Her recent publications include "Ornamenta, monumenta, exempla: Griechische Götterbilder in öffentlichen Räumen Konstantinopels" in Mylonopoulos (ed.), *Divine Images and Human Imaginations in Ancient Greece and Rome* (2010), and "L'Arco di Costantino nel suo contesto topografico," in *Costantino prima e dopo Costantino, Atti del Convegno internazionale*

(2013).

Maureen Carroll is Professor of Roman Archaeology at the University of Sheffield. She has excavated widely at major Roman sites in Italy, North Africa, Cyprus, and Britain, and was Senior Field Archaeologist with the State Archaeological Service in Cologne, Germany, until 1998. Her main fields of research are Roman death and commemoration, Roman funerary epigraphy, and Roman gardens and landscape design, her work attracting support from the European Union, the Leverhulme Trust, and the British Academy. Key publications include *Spirits of the Dead: Roman Funerary Commemoration in Western Europe* (2006), *Earthly Paradises: Ancient Gardens in History and Archaeology* (2003), and *Romans, Celts and Germans: The German Provinces of Rome* (2001). She is a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries.

Francesco de Angelis is Associate Professor of Classical Art and Archaeology at Columbia University, New York. He has researched and published widely on various aspects of ancient art and architecture—from the use of Greek mythology in Etruscan and Roman art to the role of monuments in the transmission of cultural memory, and from the architecture of justice in the Roman world to the history of classical scholarship. He is the author of a monograph on the Etruscan cinerary urns from Chiusi. He is the co-director of the Advanced Program of Ancient History and Art (APAHA), which conducts archaeological fieldwork at Hadrian's Villa in Tivoli and at Villa San Marco in Stabiae. He has been the recipient of numerous awards and scholarships, including a Getty Research Institute Fellowship, a Humboldt Fellowship, and the Lenfest Distinguished Faculty Award. His current projects include the reception of Roman state art in antiquity, notions of the body in Etruscan art, and ancient antiquarianism.

Simon Ellis was educated at Weymouth College of Education, Lincoln College Oxford, and the University of Newcastle. He has held research positions at Oxford and Dumbarton Oaks, as well as honorary lectureships at St Andrews and Reading. From 1976 to 1988 he directed British, Canadian, and US excavations at Carthage. From 2001 to 2012 he worked as a team leader at UNESCO, producing the 2009 Framework for Cultural Statistics as well as international standards for education, literacy, and ICTs. He has published some 14 books on a range of subjects including *Roman Housing* (2000), and a large number of studies on housing of the Roman to the Byzantine periods and beyond. He is currently working as a freelance contractor on culture and heritage issues.

Jane Fejfer is Professor of Classical Archaeology at University of Copenhagen. Her research centers on Roman art and the classical tradition in the eighteenth century as reflected in collecting. She also works on the archaeology of Roman Cyprus, where she co-directed a field project—*Ancient Akamas: Settlement and Environment*. Her book *Roman Portraits in Context* appeared in 2008, and she is currently working on a book about *Art Collecting in the Roman World: From Theory to Practice*.

Francisca Feraudi-Gruénais is Head Researcher at the “Epigraphic Database Heidelberg” (Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities/University of Heidelberg). She is author of *Ubi diutius nobis habitandum est* (2001), *Inschriften und “Selbstdarstellung” in stadtrömischen Grabbauten* (2003), and various articles, as well as editor of *Latin on Stone:*

Epigraphic Research and Electronic Archives (2010). Her main research interests are in the archaeology and epigraphy of ancient burial and commemoration, the reception of antiquity, and text–image relations.

Klaus Fittschen held the Chair in Classical Archaeology at the University of Göttingen from 1976–89 before becoming Director of the German Archeological Institute (DAI) in Athens until his retirement in 2001. He has published widely on aspects of ancient sculpture, and especially on Roman portraiture, and has co-authored the multivolume *Katalog der römischen Porträts in den Capitolinischen Museen und den anderen kommunalen Sammlungen der Stadt Rom*.

Christopher H. Hallett teaches Roman material culture in the Departments of History of Art and Classics at University of California at Berkeley. He is best known as a specialist in Roman sculpture, having published a number of studies on Roman portraiture, including a book-length treatment of nude portraiture—*The Roman Nude: Heroic Portrait Statuary 200 BC–AD 300* (2005). He is the recipient of a Rome Prize from the American Academy in Rome (1995–96) and a Humboldt Fellowship (1997–98). He is a practicing field archaeologist, and has participated in archaeological fieldwork in Israel, Turkey, and Egypt. Since 1991 he has worked at New York University's excavations at Aphrodisias in southwestern Turkey. He is co-author (with R.R.R. Smith, Sheila Dillon, Julia Lenaghan, and Julie van Voorhis) of *Roman Portrait Sculpture of Aphrodisias* (2006), and he is currently preparing for publication the sculpture from the city's Bouleuterion (Council House).

Tonio Hölscher was from 1975 to 2010 Professor of Classical Archaeology at the University of Heidelberg, Germany. He received his PhD in 1965 at Heidelberg and his habilitation in 1972 at Würzburg. He was Guest Professor at the University of Naples (1988), Meyer Shapiro Visiting Professor at Columbia University (1993), Fellow of the Institute for Advanced Study at Berlin (1997–98), Jerome Lecturer at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor (2001) and at the American Academy in Rome (2002), Research Professor at the German Archaeological Institute in Rome (2002–04), Sather Lecturer and Guest Professor at the University of Berkeley (2007, 2011), Guest Professor at Princeton University (2012), Guest Professor at the University of München (2014–15) and Guest Lecturer of La Chaire du Louvre at Paris (2015). His main fields of research are Greek and Roman art in political and social contexts, Greek and Roman urbanism, and theory of ancient visual culture.

Peter J. Holliday is Professor of the History of Classical Art and Archaeology at the California State University, Long Beach. His research currently focuses on the ideological and communicative dimensions of republican and early imperial art and the reception of classical art in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America. Publications include *Narrative and Event in Ancient Art* (1993) and *The Origins of Roman Historical Commemoration in the Visual Arts* (2002).

Natalie Kampen was the inaugural occupant of the Barbara Novak Chair in Art History and Women's Studies at Barnard as well as member of the graduate faculty in art history at Columbia, and Visiting Professor at the Joukowsky Institute for Archaeology and the Ancient World at Brown University. Her honors include a research fellowship at Oxford University in

2000, receipt of the Felix Neubergh Medal at the University of Gothenburg in 2004, and a visiting professorship of Art History at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi in 2010. She was the author of numerous books and articles on Roman art and on gender theory including *Image and Status: Roman Working Women in Ostia* (1981) and *Family Fictions in Roman Art* (2009), editor of *Sexuality in Ancient Art* (1996). She passed away in August 2012.

Michael Koortbojian is the Moses Taylor Pyne Professor of Roman Art and Chair of the Department of Art and Archaeology at Princeton University. He has been a Fellow of the Warburg Institute in London, King's College Cambridge, and the American Academy in Rome. He has published widely on various aspects of Roman art and Renaissance antiquarianism, including *Myth, Meaning, and Memory on Roman Sarcophagi* (1995), and *The Divinization of Caesar and Augustus: Precedents, Consequences, Implications* (2013). He is currently writing a book on the representation of space in Roman relief sculpture and its role in the historiography of "the Roman problem."

Rachel Kousser is Professor of Art History at Brooklyn College and the Graduate Center, City University of New York. She has received fellowships from the Getty Research Institute, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Mellon Foundation. Her first book, *Hellenistic and Roman Ideal Sculpture: The Allure of the Classical*, was published in 2008. Her current research project concerns violence toward images in classical and Hellenistic Greece. Her second book, *The afterlives of monumental sculptures in Classical and Hellenistic Greece: Interaction, transformation, destruction*, is forthcoming from Cambridge University Press.

Kenneth Lapatin is a curator in the department of antiquities at the J. Paul Getty Museum. A graduate of the University of California, Berkeley and the University of Oxford, he was a professor at Boston University before joining the Getty in 2002. Lapatin is the author of *Chryselephantine Statuary in the Ancient Mediterranean World* (2001), *Mysteries of the Snake Goddess: Art, Desire, and the Forging of History* (2002), *Ancient Greece: Art, Architecture, and History* (2004), *Guide to the Getty Villa* (2005), *The Last Days of Pompeii: Decadence, Apocalypse, Resurrection* (2012), *The Berthouville Silver Treasure and Roman Luxury* (2014), *Power and Pathos: Bronze Sculpture of the Hellenistic World* (2015), *Luxus: The Sumptuous Arts of Greece and Rome* (2015) and numerous articles and reviews. He has curated exhibitions on special techniques of Athenian vase painting, polychrome statuary, the lasting allure of ancient gems, Pompeii and its modern reception, and Roman silver. His research interests include ancient luxury arts, materials and techniques, historiography, and forgery.

Roger Ling is Professor Emeritus of Classical Art and Archaeology at the University of Manchester. He is a specialist in the archaeology of Roman Britain, but has also worked on archaeological projects in Italy and Turkey and has published extensively on Roman paintings and mosaics. His books include *The Greek World* (2nd edn, 1990), *Wall Painting in Roman Britain* (with Norman Davey, 1991), *Roman Painting* (1991), *Ancient Mosaics* (1998), *The Insula of the Menander at Pompeii, Vol. I: The Structures* (1997), and *Vol. II. The*

Decorations (with Lesley A. Ling, 2005), *Stuccowork and Painting in Roman Italy* (1999), *Making Classical Art: Process and Practice* (2000), and *Pompeii: History, Life and Afterlife* (2005).

Katharina Lorenz is Associate Professor in Classical Studies at the University of Nottingham. She is the author of *Bilder machen Räume: Mythenbilder in Pompeii* (2008), *Mythological Images and their Interpretation: Iconology, Semiotics and Image Studies in Ancient Art History* (forthcoming), as well as articles on storytelling in Greek and Roman art and theoretical approaches for a history of ancient art.

Susanne Muth is Professor of Classical Archaeology and the Reception of Antiquity at the Humboldt-University at Berlin. Her research interests focus on the interpretation of Greek and Roman iconography as a reflection of ancient cultural life. They are primarily centered around the use of mythical images, and representations of violence and power (*Erleben von Raum – Leben im Raum. Zur Funktion mythologischer Mosaikbilder in der römisch-kaiserzeitlichen Wohnarchitektur* (1997); *Gewalt im Bild. Das Phänomen der medialen Gewalt im Athen des 6. und 5. Jh.v.Chr.* (2008)). Key subjects include interior decoration in the Roman Empire and late antiquity, Roman tombs, and public political space in ancient Rome. Recently she has been studying Roman urbanism, and she is preparing a monograph on the Forum Romanum.

Richard Neudecker was researcher at the German Archaeological Institute (DAI) in Rome from 1984–2015 and taught Classical Archaeology as Privatdozent at the Ludwig-Maximilian-University in Munich. His monographs *Die Skulpturenausstattung römischer Villen in Italien* (1988) and *Die Pracht der Latrine: Zum Wandel öffentlicher Bedürfnisanstalten in der kaiserzeitlichen Stadt* (1994), as well as *Lebenswelten: Bilder und Räume in der römischen Stadt der Kaiserzeit* (2005), which he co-edited with Paul Zanker, fall within his wider research interest in the cultural history of the Roman imperial period.

Zahra Newby is Reader in Classics and Ancient History at the University of Warwick. She studies the art of the Roman Empire in its broadest cultural and social contexts, and is particularly interested in the reception of Greek culture under Rome. She is the author of *Greek Athletics in the Roman World: Victory and Virtue* (2005) and co-editor of *Art and Inscriptions in the Ancient World* (2007). Her forthcoming book, *Greek Myths, Roman Lives* explores the meanings of mythological imagery in Roman Italy.

Massimiliano Papini is Professor of Archaeology and History of Greek and Roman Art in the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Rome La Sapienza. His specialty is the history of Greek and Roman art, and he has published widely in both fields. In addition to numerous articles in journals and exhibition catalogues, he has written several monographs: *Palazzo Braschi: La collezione di sculture antiche* (2000), *Antichi volti della repubblica: La ritrattistica in Italia centrale tra IV e II secolo a.C.* (2004), *Munera gladiatoria e venationes nel mondo delle immagini* (2004), *L'Apollon di Mantova* (2008), *Città sepolte e rovine nel mondo greco e romano* (2011), and *Fidia. L'uomo che scolpì gli dei* (2014).

Lauren Hackworth Petersen is Professor of Art History at the University of Delaware. She is co-author of *The Material Life of Roman Slaves* (2014), co-editor of *Mothering and*

Motherhood in Ancient Greece and Rome (2012), and author of *The Freedman in Roman Art and Art History* (2006). She has received awards from the American Council of Learned Societies, Loeb Classical Library Foundation, American Academy in Rome, and Getty Foundation.

Friederike Sinn is currently a freelancer at the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden. Her publications focus on aspects of Roman sepulchral art, idealized sculpture, and the development of the Roman visual language: *Stadtrömische Marmorurnen* (1987), *Reliefs, Altäre, Urnen: Vatikanische Museen* (1991), *Reliefgeschmückte Gattungen römischer Lebenskultur: Griechische Originalskulptur. Monumente orientalischer Kulte. Vatikanische Museen* (2006). She is co-author of *Die Ausstattung des Hateriergrabes: Vatikanische Museen* (1996). Recent articles have been published in *Idealskulptur der römischen Kaiserzeit: Staatliche Kunstsammlung Dresden* (2011).

Roland R.R. Smith is Lincoln Professor of Classical Archaeology and Art at Oxford University and Director of the New York University Excavations at Aphrodisias in Turkey. His research interests are in the art and visual cultures of the ancient Mediterranean world, and in connection with his work at Aphrodisias he has a particular interest in the art and archaeology of the Greek cities of the Eastern Roman Empire.

Michael Squire studied in Britain (Cambridge), the United States (Harvard), and Germany (Humboldt-University at Berlin and Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich). He is Reader in Classical Art at King's College, London. His books include *Panorama of the Classical World* (with Nigel Spivey, 2nd edn, 2009), *Image and Text in Graeco-Roman Antiquity* (2009), *The Art of the Body: Antiquity and its Legacy* (2011), *The Art of Art History in Graeco-Roman Antiquity* (co-edited with Verity Platt, 2010), and *The Iliad in a Nutshell: Visualizing Epic on the Tabulae Iliacae* (2011).

Edmund Thomas studied Classics at Oxford and has taught at the universities of Oxford, National University of Ireland Galway, Exeter, and Durham, where he has been since 2005. His *Monumentality of the Roman Empire: Architecture in the Antonine Age* was published in 2007. He has published articles on various subjects including the Pantheon in Rome, Roman inscriptions, the aesthetics of architecture, Roman architecture in the Eastern provinces, and Roman sarcophagi. He co-edited *Cities and Gods: Religious Space in Transition* (2013) and is co-editing a volume on *The Materiality of Text*. He is working at present on a study of spirally fluted and spiral columns in antiquity, as well as on two monographs, on inscriptions in architecture, and on keystones, which both take into account architecture since classical antiquity as well as Greek and Roman buildings.

Roger J.A. Wilson is Director of the Centre for the Study of Ancient Sicily at the University of British Columbia, and Emeritus Professor of the Archaeology of the Roman Empire there. In 2013 he was awarded by his University the Killam Prize for Research in recognition of his career-long contributions to scholarship. He has been Humboldt Fellow at the University of Bonn (1987–89), Visiting Professor at McMaster University (1998), Balsdon Fellow at the British School at Rome (2003), and Guest Scholar at the Getty Villa, Malibu (2012). His books include *Guide to the Roman Remains in Britain* (1975, 1980, 1988, 2002; 5th edn in

preparation), *Piazza Armerina* (1982), *Sicily under the Roman Empire* (1990), and *Caddeddi on the Tellaro: A Late Roman Villa in Sicily and Its Mosaics* (2015).

Norbert Zimmermann has studied Christian Archaeology, Art History, and Italian Philology at Bonn, Rome, and Munich. Since 1998 he has held positions at the Institute for the Study of Ancient Culture, Austrian Academy of Sciences, and is member of the Austrian excavation team at Ephesus. In 2014, he took up the position as Second Director at the German Archaeological Institute, Rome. His main field of interest is the cultural changes between antiquity and the Middle Ages. His research focuses on residential architecture of the imperial and late antique periods, as well as on the sepulchral sphere and wall painting of late antiquity, on which he has published, among other works, the monograph *Werkstattgruppen römischer Katakombenmalerei* (2002).

List of Abbreviations

ANRW

Temporini, H. (ed.) (1972–) *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*. De Gruyter, Berlin.

CIG

Corpus inscriptionum Graecarum

CIL

Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum

EAA

Enciclopedia dell'arte antica classica e orientale

FGrHist

Jacoby, F. (1923–) *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*. Brill, Leiden.

ICUR

Inscriptiones christianae urbis Romae septimo saeculo antiquiores, vols. 1–. Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, Vatican City 1857–.

IG

Inscriptiones Graecae

IGUR

Moretti, L. (ed.) (1968–1990) *Inscriptiones Graecae Urbis Romae*, vols. 1–4. Bardi, Rome.

LIMC

Ackermann, H.C. and Gisler, J.R. *Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae*, vols. 1–8 and suppl. Artemis, Zürich (1981–2009).

LTUR

Steinby, M. (ed.) (1993–96) *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae*, vols. 1–6. Edizione Quasar, Rome.

LTUR Suburbium

La Regina, A. (ed.) (2001–08) *Lexikon Topographicum Urbis Romae, Suburbium*, vols. 1–5. Edizione Quasar, Rome.

OLD

Glare, P.G.H. (ed.) (2012) *The Oxford Latin Dictionary*, 2 vols. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

PPM

Baldassare, I., Lanzillotta, T., and Salomi, S. (eds.) (1990–2003) *Pompei : Pitture e Mosaici*, 11 vols. Istituto della enciclopedia italiana, Rome.

RIB

Haverfield, F. (ed.) *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain*. Clarendon Press and Oxbow Books, Oxford.

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Introduction

Barbara E. Borg

A Companion to Roman Art: this sounds like a pretty straightforward title—but is it? We all know what Roman “art” is—after all, the Augustus statue from Prima Porta ([Figure 10.7](#)) and the Column of Trajan ([Figure 2.1](#)) are widely known far beyond the academic realm. Or do we? We all have immediate associations with the notion of “Roman” art (as opposed, for instance, to “Greek” art). But are we sure what exactly is Roman about it? And while “companions” are springing up like mushrooms around us; and there will be few people who have never read or consulted one; and we surely have certain expectations when we read the word in a book title—is there an agreement on what they are, or should be like? At a second glance, none of these terms is as obvious as it may initially appear.

Roman?

The difficulty in determining what “Roman” may mean, arguably a definition that shifts with time, has long been discussed. That the city of Rome plays a key part is obvious, but almost everything beyond this point is disputed. Conventionally the term is used for phenomena pertaining to the imperial period, and within the borders of the Roman Empire – that is, primarily in chronological terms, even if a spatial notion comes into play, as the chronological usage would not make sense when speaking about second-century CE China, for instance. However, clearly not everything that pertains to this period and the regions of Roman influence is shaped by the cultural tradition of Rome, and even when it is, it is likely to merge metropolitan inspiration with the local. On the other hand, from its very beginnings Rome itself had been shaped by the various cultures with which it came into contact, and from the late republic onwards it was a multicultural melting pot with people from all parts of the empire and beyond settling in the city.

This raises the question of what it really is that makes certain features Roman, and whether it is the same for us as it was for the ancients. We may identify certain hairstyles or building types as Roman, but how do we know that they did not merely express a *habitus* or lifestyle that had been adopted across the Empire without necessarily being an emphatic marker of Romanness? Do Europeans always think of the United States when they drink Coca-Cola? Evidence suggests that at least the local elites and aspiring parts of the citizenry of the Roman Empire adhered to a remarkable extent to a common system of shared values, aspirations, and lifestyles; and that these also shaped the material and visual culture across the Empire. Yet disregarding whether the individuals concerned considered these as specifically Roman—as opposed to local—the degree and level of detail to which they shared in such habits and their material expressions varied widely. For example, the Roman timocratic system demanded a considerable degree of self-promotion, and the use of honorific statue monuments, either in public or in more private contexts such as houses, villas, and tombs, was one means of

achieving that aim. Nevertheless, the extent to which this habit was adopted, and the precise details of what locals regarded as worth depicting in these monuments, as well as the degree to which the monuments conveyed an explicitly Roman image, varied greatly across the Empire.

There is a chronological dimension linked to the geographical one as well. For the archaic period, the era of the kings, “Roman” would probably largely refer to the art and culture of the emerging city of Rome—although one might question how “Roman” Roman art was at a time when Greek and Etruscan art loomed large in the city. Most would extend the term step by step to include also the art of those regions that came under Roman dominion and finally formed the Roman Empire. But at what point, then, should we start calling Roman the art from, say, Campania? At the other end of the chronological spectrum, it is quite strange, and somewhat arbitrary, that the periods from Constantine onwards are very rarely included in what is generally called Roman culture. To be sure, Rome and its Empire experienced major changes at the time, but there was no cultural caesura, and even Christianity not only drew on Roman tradition in all sorts of ways, but also took quite some time fully to dominate and shape the culture of the Roman Empire and its successors.

I am not claiming to have resolved any of these issues with the present volume, and any attempt at trying to do so would probably be doomed to fail. I have therefore adopted an approach whereby the core of the volume focuses, in a rather traditional way and probably along the lines of most readers’ expectations, on the imperial period before Constantine, and to some degree on the city of Rome and Italy, but in doing so a conscious attempt was made to blur any boundaries that this traditional focus might create. I have thus included dedicated chapters on the Republican period ([Chapter 5](#), by Massimiliano Papini, but see also Rachel Kousser in [Chapter 6](#) and Peter J. Holliday in [Chapter 10](#)); on the assimilation of Greek art within the Roman empire ([Chapter 6](#), by Rachel Kousser, but see also Christopher H. Hallett in [Chapter 1](#)); and on late antiquity ([Chapter 7](#), by Alessandra Bravi; [Chapter 21](#), by Susanne Muth; and [Chapter 23](#), by Norbert Zimmermann), as well as on Roman art in the provinces ([Chapter 24](#) on the Greek East, by Roland R.R. Smith; and [Chapter 25](#) on the Latin West, by Roger J.A. Wilson), with many other authors including the provinces in their discussions.

Art?

The term “art” is at least as contested and elusive. Conventionally, and at least when we disregard modern art, it is applied to everything that is nice to look at and required some advanced skills to be produced. Yet what exactly does it take to deny an object the title of “art”? How much skill is needed to make an object acceptable as “art”? How beautiful does it need to be? And according to whose judgment? The term also carries the baggage of the modern concept of “art as such,” of art as the product of the genius artist who creates a piece of art out of his (rarely her) own mind and spirit, merely for contemplation, and without regard for the object’s purpose or function. If we subscribe to this definition, hardly anything from the classical world can be regarded as art, since the idea of art as a category of its own that is detached from aspects of usefulness and function is a modern one (Abrams 1981 and 1985). In Greco-Roman antiquity, “art” was not created for its own sake but was meant to serve a

purpose, whether as a dedication to the gods; an honorific monument to a human being; a monument depicting achievements and expressing ideologies of the state, a social group, or an individual; or furnishing of a public building, house, villa, or tomb. The main criterion for commissioning, placing, and judging art was appropriateness, decorum in relation to the purpose and context for which it was created or in which it was displayed (Hallett 2005; Perry 2005; Marvin 2008; Hallett, [Chapter 1](#), and Petersen, [Chapter 11](#), this volume).

One specific of Roman art (as opposed to Greek art in particular) is that it has often been denied its status as art altogether. While the copies after Greek works of art (or what were believed to be copies) were despised as being derivative and unoriginal, subjects and forms that had no immediate Greek models and were therefore regarded as truly Roman, such as veristic portraiture or “historical” reliefs, did not meet modern expectations of art as being contemplative, in both its production and reception, since they were considered to be primarily documentary in character, and their subjects were not necessarily beautiful either. While some of these ideas were challenged already by Alois Riegl (1901) and Franz Wickhoff (Wickhoff and von Hartel 1895) at the beginning of the twentieth century, it was only with the “historic turn” in scholarship on “classical art” that Roman art moved more into the center of scholarly attention. Following in the wake of Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli and Gerhard Rodenwaldt, and inspired by the new political awareness and interest in contemporary political issues of the late 1960s and 1970s, young scholars such as Tonio Hölscher, Paul Zanker, and Klaus Fittschen started studying Roman “art” as a source for a social history of Rome and its empire (Borg 2005; Dally 2008; Hölscher, [Chapter 2](#), this volume). The huge popularity that Roman art has enjoyed since then, not least in countries that did not have a strong tradition in art history, is largely due to the successful analysis of Roman art as a historical source. While at first this line of inquiry was applied to the images as such, contextual approaches have come to dominate more recent research. Both approaches have yielded their own results, often supplementing but sometimes also contradicting each other, and both have been given space in the present volume. Sections of [Parts II](#) and [IV](#) are dedicated to different artistic genres, [Part V](#) concentrates on display contexts, and [Part VI](#) discusses popular themes of artistic representations across several genres, while almost all chapters refer to context in one way or another. The *Companion* is therefore a reflection of this still dominant interest in Roman art.

In the choice of artistic media and display contexts, I have certainly not escaped the prejudice of common expectations raised by the term “art,” as I have largely excluded from this book genres such as terracotta lamps, roof tiles, or terra sigillata, which can all bear image decoration, some of which is very beautiful. A conventional, though mostly non-reflective, hierarchy uses “art” as a term mostly for relatively large-scale objects *without* a practical function, while the “minor arts” comprise sophisticated products, often of smaller scale, *with* practical function such as coins, silver plates, gems, or jewelry; “decorative art” usually designates mainly repetitive ornaments or allegedly meaningless but beautiful embellishments of practical objects such as furniture or architecture; and the crafts, which are ultimately impossible to differentiate from “art,” tend to be characterized by mass production, limited technical skills, less precious materials, less satisfactory aesthetic qualities, or a combination of these. Such classifications are obviously based on modern value judgments, and are utterly

anachronistic. Some scholars would therefore like to abolish the term “art” altogether and prefer terms such as “material culture” (which encompasses all artifacts of a given time and space) or “visual culture,” which tends to be used for items that are or include image decoration of some sort. None of this is fully satisfactory. While embracing the term art for all its faults, and not least in order to acknowledge that some Roman artworks are stunningly beautiful and were made with awe-inspiring skill, I have attempted to mitigate the problem, at least to some extent, by addressing a wide range of arts, not all of which will necessarily spring to a traditional mind, including architecture ([Chapter 18](#), by Edmund Thomas), luxury items (traditionally classified as “minor arts,” but often as precious in material as they were in artistic terms; [Chapter 17](#), by Kenneth Lapatin), and the “minor arts,” in this case decorative marble items ([Chapter 16](#), by Friederike Sinn). For the latter, I have deliberately kept the contentious terminology for the chapter title, in order to draw attention to these objects, which were so essential for the furnishing of houses and villas, but are so often ignored. In addition, several contributors also discuss artworks that may not necessarily elicit outbursts of enthusiasm in the average museum goer, be they from early periods (Massimiliano Papini in [Chapter 5](#)) or from the provinces (especially Roger J.A. Wilson in [Chapter 25](#), and Rachel Kousser in [Chapter 6](#)).

What have largely fallen by the wayside with the “historic turn,” however, are the artistic aspects of Roman art, the role of materials and techniques, the role of the artist, and the significance of style and aesthetics. The Romans undoubtedly had a sense of the level of skill needed to accomplish certain results, and of the visual effects generated by different materials and surfaces. They also admired some artists while ignoring others, although, especially with regard to copies of Greek artworks, the reputation of the original artist certainly mattered as well, which turned the item into “cultural capital” (Bourdieu 1979). The degree to which technique and material contributed to the aesthetics of sculpture is largely ignored in surveys of Roman art, but is demonstrated lucidly by Mont Allen in [Chapter 8](#). In [Chapter 9](#), Michael Squire makes equally intriguing observations on the marginalized question of the role of the artist in Roman culture, and Edmund Thomas has included a passage on the role of the architect in his [Chapter 18](#) on architecture as art. To complement these production-focused chapters, in [Chapters 10](#) and [11](#), Peter J. Holliday and Lauren H. Petersen explore the impact of the patron on the selection and commissioning of art, and discuss art commissioned by the emperor or the state on the one hand, and the lower classes and the freedmen on the other.

Aesthetic aspects related to styles are a subject that has only been taken up again in the last ten years or so (see especially Hallett 2005; Perry 2005; Marvin 2008) and, despite the exciting new perspectives gained on Roman art, there is still enormous scope for further research. The chapters by Holliday ([Chapter 10](#)) and Petersen ([Chapter 11](#)) also contrast stylistic choices that depended on both patrons and subject matter, and Petersen includes a lucid analysis of the history of Roman art history with particular attention to the derogative assessments of non-classical styles in Roman art in past (and even some more recent) scholarship. Christopher H. Hallett opens the volume by fundamentally challenging established positions and terminologies, and with a forceful bid for a new interest in Roman art as “art” and in its aesthetic and stylistic aspects, and it is interesting to observe that the subject is picked up in

some other chapters as well (e.g., in [Chapter 8](#) by Allen, [Chapter 9](#) by Squire, [Chapter 6](#) by Kousser, and [Chapter 11](#) by Petersen). Hallett also makes clear how deeply research in Roman art was, and still is, entangled with modern aesthetic value judgments. The wavering currency of Roman art in the modern era is addressed to various degrees in several other chapters as well, and taken up again in the final two chapters specifically dedicated to the reception of Roman art, thus rounding off the book and returning to subjects with which it started. In [Chapter 29](#), Rosemary J. Barrow traces the influence that the excavations at Pompeii and Herculaneum, and especially the frescos from these sites, had on modern decorators and artists, while in [Chapter 30](#) Stefan Altekamp discusses the influence of Roman architecture on modern building.

Companion?

Finally, we come to the term “companion.” Over the last two decades or so, the companion has had an amazing career as a literary genre in its own right. Loved by students as an up-to-date answer to all their questions, companions are highly successful commercially, but sometimes regarded with suspicion by scholars for their alleged lack of originality and original research (although I suspect that these same scholars use them as convenient introductions to fields with which they are less familiar when they need to engage with them). However, while there are huge differences in approaches, most companion editors, and many of their authors, strive to give their volumes their very own spin, and to inspire new research and thought as much as presenting widely agreed certainties. This is not the place to review the companion practice in general, or to pass judgment. Instead, I would like to add a few further remarks on my own ideas behind the concept of the present book.

First, companions are highly successful. They are used widely, and by a wide range of audiences including undergraduate students, scholars, and the interested public. As such, they are an excellent way of promoting a subject, disseminating ideas, and stimulating questions and further research. Although there is now an increasing number of companions on art and other material culture, text-based subjects predominate by far, and even in companions “to the age of X,” it is usually one chapter at best that addresses material culture and “art” (see Galinsky 2005 for a notable exception). There is, thus, a real need to draw attention to non-textual aspects of human expression and communication, and to demonstrate that “art” is an integral part of the culture and history of any given society and era.

A second aspect is the fragmentation of the field – that is, of studies in Roman art – which often develops along the lines of both artistic media and national and language boundaries, with the latter concerning both subject areas and specific approaches. To be sure, there is no lack of excellent introductions to the study of Roman art, such as Brilliant (1974), Strong (1976), Andreae (1977), Brendel (1979), Henig (1983), Heintze (1990), Ramage and Ramage (1991a and b), D’Ambra (1993), Stewart (2004 and 2008), Zanker (2007), and Kleiner (2010), to name only the most influential and/or recent publications that have appeared in the English language. Yet due to their more limited word count, by comparison to this volume, they necessarily remain at the surface of the wide range of questions and subjects that they typically

include, or follow a very individual approach, thus neglecting different ways of thinking about the material in question and different methodologies. While it is obviously impossible ever to be fully comprehensive, there are advantages in having the opportunity to present the subject on 671 pages rather than 200 pages or less. I have at least tried to incorporate as wide a range as possible of what I felt to be most central to the study of Roman “art.” Apart from the aspects already mentioned, this also includes three chapters on methodological questions by scholars whose work has been essential for the “historic turn” in the field, and thus for raising interest in Roman art in general since the 1970s, and whose contributions to the development of research questions and methodologies have been hugely influential: Tonio Hölscher on “historical reliefs” ([Chapter 2](#)), Klaus Fittschen on portraiture ([Chapter 3](#)), and the late Natalie Kampen on gender studies ([Chapter 4](#)). In addition, I have been able to collect contributions from scholars of all degrees of seniority in order to benefit from both the broad experience and wide-ranging knowledge of established scholars, and the bright new ideas and approaches of more junior ones (which of course does not insinuate either that senior scholars do not have bright new ideas, or that junior ones would not know their subject and material). Moreover, the contributors to this volume come from seven different nationalities, thus reflecting, to some degree, scholarly approaches shaped by the different national traditions.

Some readers may complain that this results in a lack of coherence in approach, some may like some contributions more than others, and some will certainly miss aspects that they consider important to the field (or indeed represent their nation). I have deliberately hazarded at least the first two complaints. I wanted this *Companion* not just to be a convenient summary of the state of the art (“according to Borg”), but to reflect the diversity of the field, to give food for thought, and to stimulate further engagement with the subject. I hope that it presents the field not as a “closed shop,” or as one that has had all its problems solved, but as a vibrant field of research that engages in stimulating controversies, strives for suitable methodologies and approaches, and bears huge potential for future research, not least for the young generation of students and scholars.

Acknowledgments

This *Companion* has taken almost six years to be produced, and has left me with a great debt of gratitude to many people and institutions. I owe thanks, first of all, to all contributors to the present volume, who have been willing not only to summarize previous work but to rethink it and present it in an accessible and stimulating way, and who patiently supported the process throughout the years. I am also greatly indebted to Henry Heitmann-Gordon for his substantial improvements to the English translation from the German, and to Eleni Manolaraki for her translations from the Italian. Devon Harlow and especially Petra Bielecki supported me in the editing process. Particular thanks are also due to the individuals and institutions who provided the images for the *Companion*, and granted publication rights; they are acknowledged individually in the List of Illustrations and captions. The College of Humanities at the University of Exeter, the Getty Foundation, the Onassis Foundation, and the British School at Rome supported my work on the *Companion* by granting and funding study leave, and by

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PART I

Methods and Approaches

CHAPTER 1

Defining Roman Art

Christopher H. Hallett

The Discovery of Roman Art in the Late Nineteenth Century

A hundred years of “Roman art”

“Roman art” was first identified as a distinct subfield within the history of art only in the late nineteenth century; and the first scholars to attempt to define the subject, Franz Wickhoff and Alois Riegl, felt compelled to adopt a markedly defensive tone (Wickhoff and von Hartel 1895/1900; Riegl 1901/1985; Brendel 1979, 25–37). Up to that time art historians, following the lead of Winckelmann, had regarded the art produced in the Roman period as simply “ancient art in its period of decline”—a motley art, unlike Egyptian or classical Greek art, in that it possessed no recognizable *style* all of its own. Of course, the Romans themselves were partly responsible for this eighteenth- and nineteenth-century view. Had not Virgil, in a celebrated passage of the *Aeneid*, put into the mouth of one of his characters a memorable prophecy (Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.847–848)?

*“excudent alii spirantia mollius aera
(credo equidem), vivos ducent de marmore vultus...”*

“Others will hammer out bronze till it is soft and breathes, and will draw forth from marble living faces...”

This is referring, of course, to the Greeks. The Romans—in the very same passage—are charged with a rather different destiny (Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.851–853):

*“Tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento
(hae tibi erunt artes), pacique imponere morem,
parcere subiectis et debellare superbos.”*

*“But you, Roman, remember to rule Earth’s peoples with imperium!
For these shall be your arts: to crown peace with the rule of law,
To spare the vanquished and to battle down the proud.”*

Read together with other well-known excerpts from Latin literature, like Horace’s oft-quoted remark (Horace, *Epistles* 2.1.156) “*Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit et artis / intulit agreste Latio*” (“captive Greece took her uncouth conqueror captive, and introduced the arts into rustic Latium”), Virgil’s lines inevitably suggest that there really was no Roman art. And

by the late nineteenth century most educated people seem to have taken this for granted. George Bernard Shaw, for example, offers this very loose version of the Virgilian passage just quoted, in his play *Caesar and Cleopatra* of 1898. We are in the last act (Act V), and Julius Caesar is about to board ship and set off from Alexandria for Rome. He calls out to the Sicilian Greek, Apollodorus, a freelance “artist” and carpet salesman:

caesar:

Apollodorus, I leave the art of Egypt in your charge. Remember:
Rome loves art and will encourage it ungrudgingly.

apollodorus:

I understand, Caesar. Rome will produce no art itself; but it will buy up and take away whatever the other nations produce.

caesar:

What! Rome produce no art! Is peace not an art? is war not an art? is government not an art? is civilization not an art? All these we give you in exchange for a few ornaments. You will have the best of the bargain.

Thus, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, those scholars who were attempting to found the new field of “Roman art” felt that they were faced with two urgent tasks. The first was to try to establish that there really *was* such a thing as “Roman art”; that it was not merely *Greek* art in decline. The second was to show that the art of this period was not merely a mass of heterogeneous and disparate works, related to one another only in being products of the same time and culture; but that it represented instead a clear artistic development, shaped by identifiable aesthetic goals.

Looking back after more than a century of scholarship, we may fairly say that in the first aim scholars of Roman art were remarkably successful. Talk of “decline” has been all but banished from our books—even when discussing the art of late antiquity—and few writers now feel the need to justify the subject as an independent field of study, distinct from Greek and Hellenistic art. In the second aim, however, the field has been conspicuously less successful. Within particular genres of monument, like historical relief or monumental sarcophagi, scholars have made great strides in describing and analyzing the way in which styles change; and plausible explanations have been advanced as to why they change as they do. Yet overall, a glance through any modern textbook of Roman art reveals the same very varied assortment of material: a selection of Roman buildings, portraits, coins, mosaics, and so on; and how these various genres of artwork are all to be related to one another in *aesthetic* terms—that is, in terms of their style, their formal composition, or their outward appearance—remains as unclear as ever (compare the more or less contemporary works [Figures 1.3](#), [2.1](#), and [3.9](#), for example). No consensus has emerged on what are the defining characteristics of this art; and no way has yet been found of understanding all the various genres of Roman art—from wall paintings to imperial cameos—as parts of a unified artistic tradition.

Thus, the field has achieved remarkable success in one key aim, and striking lack of success in another. In this chapter I shall argue that these two outcomes are directly related. The current definition that we have of “Roman art” was devised specifically in order to defend it from the charge that it was really *Greek* art in a stage of decline; and this modern, restrictive definition to some extent prevents us from seeing Roman art *as a whole*, and perceiving the links and associations that unite all its products. Further, in the latter part of the chapter I shall propose a way out of the current dilemma, and offer a new formulation for understanding artistic production in the Roman world.

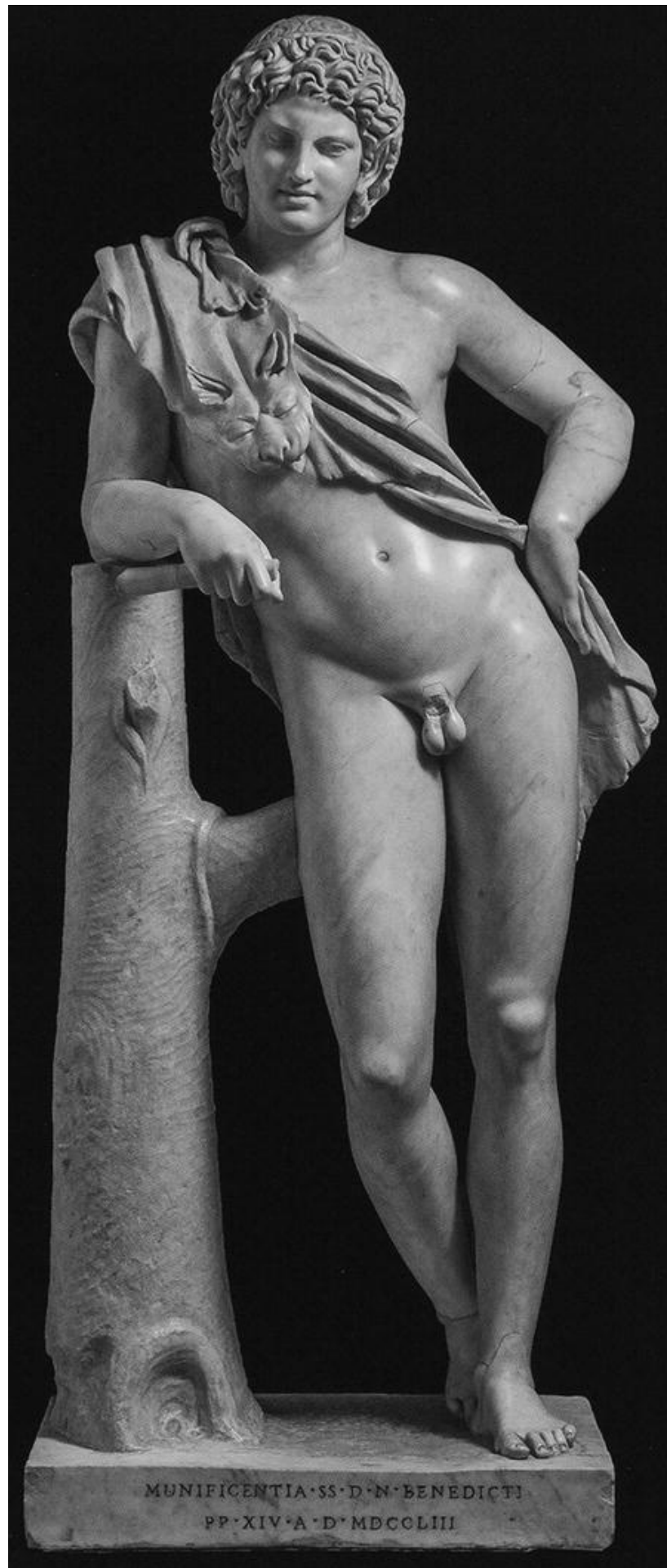
Continuing Problems of Definition

What is Roman about Roman art?

Those who first attempted to distinguish Roman art from Greek art started with representations of distinctly Roman *subject matter*, and the genre that we have come to know as “Roman historical relief,” in which Roman public ceremonies or historical events were commemorated ([Figures 2.3–2.6, 11.2](#)). Greek art offered no real precedent for this kind of representation; in its time it was clearly something authentically new. The products of late antique art were quickly also included ([Figures 7.2, 7.8, 8.4](#)), since they plainly represented the gradual abandonment of Greek and Hellenistic standards of representation. The next group of monuments to be widely recognized as properly part of *Roman art* were the portraits ([Figures 3.1–3.10, 12.2–12.6](#)). Here, of course, no one was arguing that the Greeks had not had portraits (distinctive and immediately identifiable images of specific individuals), merely that *Roman* portraits were sufficiently different, in style and appearance, to be regarded as an original creation of Roman culture. And rather similar considerations led to the inclusion of monumental carved sarcophagi ([Figures 1.8, 15.4, 28.2](#)). The reliefs on these are so unlike anything in earlier Greek art that—even where the subject matter is straightforwardly Greek—they could safely be regarded as something new. (Certainly there was no danger of these works appearing in books on *Greek* art.) Mosaics were not far behind the sarcophagi, since this was a medium enthusiastically taken up in the Roman period, and developed in wholly new directions ([Figures 14.4–14.6, 21.6–21.7](#)). And here, in a nutshell, we have the most important building blocks of any early twenty-first-century book on Roman art. If one adds a smattering of wall paintings, presented from the point of view of Roman domestic decoration ([Figures 13.1–13.5](#)), and a selection of the art produced for the middle levels of Roman society ([Figures 4.5, 11.3, 11.5](#))—non-elite art, sometimes still misleadingly referred to as “plebeian art”—then we have the recipe for just about everything that one finds in a contemporary handbook of Roman art. In short, our books on Roman art may be described as perfect responses to the question: “What is *Roman* about Roman art?”

The problem with all of this, of course, is that what we are calling “Roman art” is actually a *selection*. It leaves out of the picture a large part of Roman artistic production. Whole categories of objects, produced in great quantity during this period, are either not acknowledged at all or are only very selectively admitted. Where, for example, are all the

images of the gods (e.g., [Figures 4.9, 5.7–5.8, 7.5](#))? The enormous temple images, the votive reliefs, the figurines? Where is that vast army of mythological beings that occupied Rome's parks and public baths? The Muses, Amazons, Nymphs, Nereids, Hippocamps, Centaurs, Satyrs, Hermaphrodites, Pans, and Maenads (e.g., [Figures 1.1, 8.2](#))? Where are the Greek heroes, Achilles, Meleager, Odysseus, and the rest (e.g., [Figure 28.3](#))? The many copies of famous classical statues—the *Diskobolos*, the *Doryphoros* ([Figure 9.5](#)), the Knidian Aphrodite? Where are the thousands of pieces of villa furniture—the marble urns, candelabra, Neo-Attic reliefs, marble tables, well-heads, figured altars, and so on ([Figures 16.1–16.7](#))? In a book like Diana Kleiner's *Roman Sculpture* (1992), perhaps the most authoritative modern treatment of the subject in English with more than 400 illustrations, we find these categories scarcely represented at all. The (wholly traditional) focus of the book—on portraits and historical relief—means that in terms of quantity, at a conservative estimate perhaps 60 percent of the sculptural output of the Roman world is silently omitted. Similarly, in the modern books that claim to present not only sculpture but the whole of Roman art, and include other genres like painting and mosaics, the discussion of wall painting tends to focus on systems of interior decoration (Mau's "four Pompeian styles"; cf. [Figure 13.1](#)); while the importance of mythological paintings—which often form the centerpieces of Roman murals—is generally played down, for such paintings are almost exclusively Greek in content (e.g. [Figures 6.4, 13.4, 19.4](#)). And the huge bulk of Greek subjects represented in mosaics and on sarcophagi also tends to be passed over in favor of more distinctly "Roman" or contemporary themes, such as hunting (in mosaics) or scenes of battle (on sarcophagi).



MUNIFICENTIA·SS·D·N·BENEDICTI
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Figure 1.1 Young Satyr known in Rome since the eighteenth century. It served as the inspiration for Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Marble Faun* (1860). Rome, Capitoline Museum. Palazzo Nuovo, Sala di Galata, inv. S739. Photo: Archäologisches Institut, Cologne Digital Archaeology Laboratory, Universität zu Köln, Mal1963-3_15892 (www.arachne.uni-koeln.de).

So, our books of Roman art present a very partial picture: representative pieces are included of perhaps less than half of what we know was produced. There would be nothing wrong with this, of course, if it were openly stated. But in fact, this selection is made *without* explicit acknowledgment. Or rather, modern scholars regard this acknowledgment as made by the title on the cover of the book: *Roman sculpture* or *Roman art*. All of the material that has been left out, when it is referred to at all in these books, is described as *Greek art*.

In Roman culture, “art” means Greek art

Unfortunately, there is a further complicating factor. When Romans discuss art in their literature, as they quite often do, “art” for them means *Greek art*. Late Republican Rome already possessed a fully developed “art market,” replete with an accepted canon of old masters, fanatical collectors (C. Verres, of course, being the most notorious example), pretentious connoisseurs, massively inflated prices, professional art dealers, unscrupulous forgers, and public art galleries—which have been claimed by some as the first “art museums” (Alsop 1982; Chevallier 1991; Strong 1994, 13–30; Bounia 2004). All of these categories are well documented from the literary sources. I cannot do more than glance at this “art market” here, but a brief survey will allow me to highlight some of its most characteristic features.

The collectibles most frequently mentioned by Roman writers are bronze figurines; and of these, *Corinthia*, “Corinthian bronzes,” were the most prized (Emanuele 1989; Bounia 2004, 195–196, 252–253). However, antique silverware ([Figure 17.3](#)), engraved gems, citrus-wood tables, and drinking vessels carved out of semi-precious stones ([Figures 17.1–17.2](#)) were also popular. The emperor Nero reportedly paid a million sesterces for a bowl carved out of fluorspar (Pliny, *Natural History* 37.20). This is apparently the notorious stone that Romans called *murra*—the “myrrh-stone” (Loewenthal and Harden 1949, 31–37; Harden 1954, 53; André, Bloch, and Rouveret 1981, 126–127; there are two fine examples in the British Museum ([Figure 17.1](#))). In the interest of space, however, I shall concentrate my attention exclusively on another category of artwork beloved of Roman collectors: old master panel paintings.

The orator Hortensius reportedly paid 144,000 sesterces for a painting of the Argonauts by Kydias, a Greek painter of the fourth century BCE, and built an elaborate pavilion for it in his Tusculan villa. Pliny describes this as an *aedes*, a “shrine” (Pliny, *Natural History* 35.130). Marcus Agrippa paid the city of Cyzicus 1,200,000 sesterces for two antique paintings—an Ajax and an Aphrodite—and he later displayed a series of panel paintings in the hot rooms of the public baths that he built in the Campus Martius (Pliny, *Natural History* 35.26). Julius Caesar was also a keen collector: Suetonius informs us that he collected not only paintings, but

also engraved gems, metalwork, and statues as well—all of antique workmanship (Suetonius, *Iulius Caesar* 47). He displayed six cases of his gems in the temple of Venus Genetrix (Pliny, *Natural History* 37.11) and paid 80 talents (about two million sesterces) for two paintings, a Medea and an Ajax, by Timomachus, which he dedicated in the same building (Pliny, *Natural History* 7.126). To give an idea of what these prices mean, a daily wage for an unskilled laborer in this period is about three to four sesterces. I mention these prices merely to illustrate what collectors were willing to pay on the open market for genuine masterpieces.

Roman authors sometimes satirize the intense feelings that Greek art aroused in enthusiasts. Here is Encolpius, the protagonist of Petronius' *Satyricon*, at a loose end in Pozzuoli (Petronius, *Satyricon* 83):

“In pinacothecam perveni vario genere tabularum mirabilem. Nam et Zeuxidos manus vidi nondum vetustatis iniuria victas, et Protogenis rudimenta cum ipsius naturae veritate certantia non sine quodam horrore tractavi. Iam vero Apellis quam Graeci monoknêmon appellant, etiam adoravi. Tanta enim subtilitate extremitates imaginum erant ad similitudinem praecisae, ut crederes etiam animorum esse picturam.”

“I went into a picture gallery (*pinacotheca*) which had a wonderful variety of paintings. For instance I saw the handiwork of Zeuxis, not yet overcome by the ravages of time. And I even examined, not without a certain thrill (*horror*), some preliminary sketches (*rudimenta*) by Protogenes, which vied with the truth of nature herself. But that masterpiece of Apelles, which the Greeks call the *monoknêmon* (“the one-kneed”)—I practically worshipped. For the outlines of the figures were so subtle and clear-cut they seemed to express the subjects’ very souls.”

The effusive language of the art connoisseur is here parodied by being put in the mouth of the hapless vagabond Encolpius. In a similar vein, Quintilian observes that some art enthusiasts of his day affected an exaggerated admiration for the almost “primitive” works of the early classical painters Polygnotos and Aglaophon, out of what he terms “their ostentatious desire to seem to be connoisseurs” (Quintilian, *Institutes of Oratory* 12.10.3: *proprio quodam intelligendi, ut mea opinio est, ambitu*), while Statius writes (perhaps rather optimistically) of the collector Novius Vindex (Statius, *Silvae*, 4.6.22–24): *quis namque oculis certaverit usquam / Vindicis, artificium veteres agnoscere ductus / et non inscriptis auctorem reddere signis?* (“Whoever could compete with the eye of Vindex in recognizing the works of an old master, or in identifying the sculptor of an unsigned statue?”)

The majority of the literary reports and anecdotes naturally concern works by canonical “greats” or *antiqui* (old masters): the Greek artists of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE. And it has been estimated that the public places of Rome in the early empire contained an astonishing number of works from this period: at least fourteen works by Praxiteles, eight by Skopas, four by Lysippos, three each by Euphranor, Myron, and Sthennis, two each by Pheidias, Polykleitos, and Strongylion; four paintings by Aristides, four by Nikias, three each by Apelles and Nikomachos, two each by Zeuxis, Parrhasius, and Antiphilos, and works by Polygnotos, Timanthes, and Pausias besides (Pollitt 1978, 157–158; see also Celani 1998). And this is a very conservative estimate: the great cavalry squadron of Alexander by the sculptor Lysippos

—comprising perhaps 26 equestrian figures—is counted here as one work. In addition, Rome was evidently full of works by the most sought-after *contemporary* Greek artists too (although these are generally treated in our literary sources as far inferior in stature to the old masters). Not surprisingly, however, the best of these seem to have commanded huge fees. L. Lucullus reportedly commissioned the sculptor Arkesilaos to make an image of *Felicitas* for him, at a cost of a million sesterces (Pliny, *Natural History* 35.156). Arkesilaos also made the cult image of Venus Genetrix for Julius Caesar (*ibid.*), and his statues of “centaurs carrying nymphs” were later included in the collection of sculpture put on permanent exhibition by Asinius Pollio in the library attached to the *Atrium Libertatis* (Pliny, *Natural History* 36.33). Whether works by old masters, or by leading contemporary artists; whether dedicated in public—in parks, temples, porticos, or baths—or displayed in private—in the houses and villas of the wealthy elite, it is clear from the literary sources that all of these Greek works epitomized “art” for the Romans.

Wall paintings and villa furnishings as evidence for Roman attitudes toward art

In the mid-first century BCE, the luxurious villas of L. Lucullus were famous for their galleries of paintings (Varro, *Three Books on Agriculture* 1.2.10), and dining in one’s *pinacotheca* quickly became chic (*ibid.*, 1.59.2). Vitruvius simply takes it for granted that the villas of the *nobiles* will include picture galleries (Vitruvius, *Ten Books on Architecture* 1.2.7, 6.3.8, 6.4.2, 6.5.2, 6.7.3). Interestingly, we can perhaps discover something of how collectors like Lucullus displayed their valuable collections from surviving wall paintings. Many Roman houses have rooms that are quite plainly decorated as *pinacothecae* ([Figure 6.4](#)), with illusionistic renderings of Greek mythological panel paintings set in elaborate frames (on ancient frames see Ehlich 1953; 1977, 110–119; 1978, 167–176; 1979, 8–20; 1986; Bragantini and Badoni 1985). This small cubiculum comes from the luxuriously decorated house beside the Tiber discovered in the late nineteenth century in the gardens of the Villa Farnesina.

We know that in the Roman period panel paintings were generally inset into a gallery wall (Philostratus, *Images* 1.295K.26: *enêrmosmenôn*) rather than hung, as they are today; so we must imagine the large ornamental frames as fixed, worked in various precious materials, and forming part of the fabric of the wall. Collectors apparently favored placing a large vertical panel painting in the center of a wall (viewing the painted *aedicula* in [Figure 6.4](#), one thinks naturally of the *aedes* that Hortensius constructed for his painting of the Argonauts) and they then would set smaller panels on either side. Sometimes these smaller side panels were painted as if fitted with wooden shutters, to protect the old painting inside from fading, and displayed high up; although of course the doors are invariably painted as if open—as if the host has put his valuable collection on display for his honored guests. (These shutters had apparently originated as a protective device for votive paintings set up in sanctuaries, so may also have had sacred “votive” associations; see Scheibler 1998.) And if we look more closely at the subsidiary flanking panels from cubiculum B of the house under the Farnesina ([Figure 6.4](#)), we see that they are very early works of Greek painting, almost like line drawing against a white background, and very different in style from the later painting seen in the center of the

wall. Such contrasts in size, subordinating smaller works to larger ones, and contrasts in style or technique, between paintings exhibited together, may have been typical of such displays. And if the evidence of wall painting can be trusted, collectors were keen to create elaborate contemporary frames and settings for their prize pieces, which would incorporate them in the overall design of the room.

The surviving marble sculpture from Roman villas ([Figures 20.1–20.2](#), [16.1–16.7](#)) provides evidence for the Roman *reception* of Greek art in the same way as do these imitation *pinacothecae*. The sculptures themselves, however, are more akin to expensive pieces of furniture than to the Corinthian bronzes so coveted by collectors. [Figure 16.2](#), for example, shows a relief-decorated marble puteal or well-head; [Figure 16.5](#), on the other hand, illustrates a finely carved marble krater, both intended to be displayed in a peristyle garden. It is probably wrong to think of assemblages of decorative marbles from domestic settings as “collections.” However, the arrangements of all of this sculpture in the porticoes and gardens of Roman houses were definitely intended to be viewed as *ensembles*, and clearly owed something to the great public displays of Greek original works in the capital: the Porticus of Pompey’s theater, the *Horti* of Caesar, the baths of Agrippa, the *Atrium Libertatis*. In some Campana reliefs we see the combination—within a single portico—of statues of nude Greek athletes, gods, herm shafts, marble urns, and basins (e.g., [Figure 1.2](#)).



Figure 1.2 “Campana plaque” with portico showing a statue of Mercury in the center. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, Francis Barlett Donation of 1900, inv. 03.885.

Photo: © 2014 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Such objects were certainly *not* collector’s items (Neudecker 1998; *contra* Bartman 1991). Yet, it is mistaken to think that marble reproductions of famous Greek statues, and other furnishings of this sort, were not highly valued. The best of them were clearly very expensive, and there was certainly no stigma attached to “copies” in Roman culture. Lucullus reportedly paid the staggering sum of two talents (about 50,000 sesterces) for a copy of a famous work by the fourth-century painter Pausias (our texts refer to the copy as an *apographon*), and we are told that the copy was made by a leading painter of the day, Dionysios of Athens (Pliny, *Natural History* 35.125–126). The sculptor Zenodorus, creator of the colossus of Nero, made copies of two silver cups, allegedly by the fifth-century sculptor Kalamis, that were widely praised as being scarcely distinguishable from the originals (Pliny, *Natural History* 34.47). The rooms of the reopened Palatine museum in Rome contain many marble copies of well-known Greek works that all once stood in the palace of the Caesars—some of them of absolutely superlative quality (e.g., Tomei 1997, nos. 102, 120). The best of these show that in terms of sculptural technique these “Roman copies” far surpass anything that was made in

marble in the fifth century BCE. A marble copy of another classical type was found in a small private *cubiculum* of the emperor Tiberius' villa on Capri (Maiuri 1997, 72, fig. 29); and the other imperial villas were packed with replicas of Greek works (see the inventory of works from the various imperial villas given in Neudecker 1988). Reproductions of classical statuary actually seem to be the works of sculpture most frequently signed by sculptors in the Roman period, and this too perhaps tells us something about their status in contemporary culture—as art objects.

Still more interestingly, Romans do not generally refer to such works as “copies.” Lucian preserves a description of a private house of the second century CE, the courtyard of which contained Myron's *Diskobolos*, the *Tyrannicides* of Kritias and Nesiotes, and the *Diadoumenos* of Polykleitos (Lucian, *Lover of Lies* 18). Obviously, the originals of these statues all stood elsewhere. And Statius describes the seaside villa of Pollius Felix as containing works by Apelles, Pheidias, Myron, and Polykleitos (*Silvae* 2.2.61–72). Once again, originals cannot be meant: none of the imperial complexes of the capital could boast a collection of old masters like that. This list can easily be extended. For example, Propertius (2.31.7–8) describes the statues of cows set around the altar of Palatine Apollo as the *armenta Myronis*, “the oxen of Myron”—presumably multiple copies of his famous bronze heifer from the Athenian Acropolis; while Juvenal (3.216–17) relates the story of a wealthy childless man whose house burned down, so that all his property was lost, but who then is the recipient of a flood of presents from legacy hunters: included among the gifts are some “nude white figures” and “something by the famous Euphranor or Polykleitos.” In such passages it is never explicitly acknowledged that we are talking about reproductions. But why should it be? If today an admirer of Renaissance art were described as having Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* in his living room and Leonardo's “Vitruvian Man” at the top of the staircase, this would generally not be misunderstood.

Copies or not, all of this material is what a Roman would have thought of as “art.” And it is all of this material that is conspicuously *absent* from our books on Roman art. If such statues are ever illustrated in modern books on Roman art, they appear in rare studies like Cornelius Vermeule's *Greek Sculpture and Roman Taste* (1977); or books explicitly concerned with Roman copies, like Margarete Bieber's *Ancient Copies* (1977). More commonly, such statues are to be found in books of *Greek* art.

What we call “Roman art” was not “art” as far as Romans were concerned

Having established what *Romans* generally thought of as “art,” we are now faced with an interesting paradox. Our books of Roman art contain almost exclusively works that, from the Roman point of view, were *not* art. For when Romans refer to the ancestral family portraits of the *nobiles* of the Republic (the *imagines*), the statues of the emperor and his family, and the carved reliefs of Roman public monuments, they do not speak of them as “artworks.” Sallust, in the introduction to his account of the war with Jugurtha, writes (Sallust, *Jugurthine War* 4.5):

Nam saepe ego audivi Q. Maxumum, P. Scipionem, praeterea civitatis nostrae praeclaros viros solitos ita dicere, cum maiorum imagines intuerentur, vehementissime sibi animum ad virtutem accendi.

I have often heard that Fabius Maximus and Scipio Africanus, and other illustrious men of our state, used to say that when they gazed upon the portrait masks (*imagines*) of their ancestors, their hearts were fired with an ardent aspiration to *virtus*.

A book by Harriet Flower set out to collect all the references to the *imagines* in Roman literature (Flower 1996, 281–325); strikingly, in this large body of literary testimonia, it is *never once* mentioned by any ancient author that they are the work of artists. Romans just do *not* say things like, “Fabius Maximus often used to remark how well the sculptor had captured his grandfather’s characteristic stern expression in his *imago*.” In producing such works the artist’s goal was to be completely invisible; and the same is more or less true for imperial portraits, too. No Roman writer ever thought it worth recording the names of the artists who created the great imperial portraits. If the portraits of the emperor and his family are mentioned *at all* in contemporary texts, they are discussed in quite different terms from works of Greek art. A passage from a letter to the emperor Hadrian, written by the historian Arrian when he was governor of Cappadocia, will serve as a representative example (Arrian, *Circumnavigation of the Black Sea* 1.3–4, 2.1):

Your statue [in Trapezon] stands in a pleasing posture (for it points towards the sea), but the work does not resemble you and is otherwise not of good quality. Please send me a statue that is worthy to carry your name, in the same posture.

Note that it is the lack of resemblance to the emperor that is the portrait’s prime fault. Imperial images were, of course, always acknowledged as the products of sculptors and painters; but they are never mentioned in the same breath with the works of the old masters, or even for that matter with the works of *contemporary* Greek artists—those who made the most famous cult images and votives for Roman temples.

Modern Difficulties in Approaching the Art of the Roman Period

“Roman art” is a modern category; it fulfills modern expectations of “art”

I must now return to the point from which I started. Roman art is a modern category; the term was coined in the late nineteenth century. There is no ancient category “Roman art.” Romans were quite ready to compare Roman literary figures with Greek ones; Cicero with Demosthenes in the practice of oratory; Virgil with Homer in epic poetry; Sallust with Thucydides in the writing of history (Quintilian, *Institutes of Oratory* 10). However, no Roman ever refers to the existence of an *ars Romana*—a distinctly Roman *visual* art to compare with Greek art. That is why no one in antiquity ever thought of asking the question:

“Who is the Roman Pheidias?” The best parallel here is not with poetry or oratory, but with philosophy. Many Romans were enthusiastic about philosophy, from Lucretius to Cicero, Seneca to Marcus Aurelius, and it came to play an important role in Roman society. Yet, it remained something foreign; it was never accepted as part of the *mos maiorum*. Nor were the visual arts.

Now, it is not my purpose here to try to argue that there is no such thing as Roman art. However, I *do* want to emphasize that those of us who study Roman art are studying a late nineteenth-century category. Furthermore, the sort of works that we generally call “Roman art” fulfill our modern, post-Romantic expectations of art very effectively. Roman portraits and historical reliefs, for example, are original creations of their own time; they are “expressive” of the age in which they were made, and they clearly embody *Roman* cultural values. Nevertheless, art historians understandably try to play up those aspects of Roman works that most effectively answer our *modern* expectations, and play down those aspects that thwart them.

One persistent problem for modern scholars, for example, has been the question of the artists who made all this material. Mostly artists of the Roman period do not sign their work; but where they do, they mostly have Greek names and they sign in Greek (Toynbee 1951). Moreover, the literary sources record for us a not inconsiderable number of artists working for Roman patrons: all but a handful of them have Greek names; and some of those few with Roman names look like successful Greeks who were granted Roman citizenship, or Greek freedmen. In the face of the modern belief that the visual arts are a crucial medium for the forging of cultural or ethnic identity, this has been felt to be deeply disturbing. There are only two artists whose names are recorded in the literary sources as having made portraits of emperors: Dioskourides the gem carver, who worked for Augustus (Suet. *Augustus* 50); and Zenodorus, who created the bronze colossus of Nero (Pliny, *Natural History* 34.45–47)—both Greeks. Likewise, the creator of the greatest of the imperial fora, the Forum of Trajan, was also a Greek: Apollodorus of Damascus (Dio Cassius 69.4.1). It has proved very troubling to modern scholars that veristic or imperial portraits, or other key works of “*Roman art*,” should have been signed by Greeks; let alone that the characteristic styles of these monuments might be the creation of Greek artists and architects working for Roman patrons. The main thrust of Diane Conlin’s well-regarded (and beautifully produced) book *The Artists of the Ara Pacis* (1997), for example, is to argue from a detailed analysis of sculptural technique that those who carved the altar were Italians, not Greeks; or “Italian-trained,” as the author puts it. I cite this study merely to emphasize that we are still as desperately keen as ever that Roman art should somehow be authentically Roman *in our eyes*.

We cannot accept as art what functioned as art in Roman society

So what we call “Roman art” seems like art to us; but we have real difficulty with the material that *functioned* as art in Roman society ([Figures 1.1](#), [1.6](#), [9.5](#), [16.1](#), [16.7](#), and [20.6](#)—the Erechtheum caryatids, redeployed around a pool). For it spectacularly does not fulfill our expectations of what art *ought* to do. It is transparently not the original creation of its own time; and it is expressive (from our perspective) primarily of the values and ideals of Greek

culture—and of Greek culture *centuries before* the Roman period. Nevertheless, the practice of simply excluding all of these “Greek” works from our accounts of art in the Roman period is also quite plainly unsatisfactory. And this has led to a number of attempts in the last 40 years to rehabilitate this material, and to make it more acceptable to modern sensibilities.

It quickly attracted attention here that Roman copyists regularly introduced changes and variations into their reproduction of famous classical statues, in a way that would be unthinkable today. These changes range from relatively modest to quite dramatic. For example, in the reproduction of the classical “Diomedes” type in Munich, the sculptor has merely added a sword belt and scabbard to the figure (Stewart 1990, 168, pl. 440); whereas in the reproduction of the *Diadoumenos* of Polykleitos found on Delos, the sculptor has supplied a statue support with a quiver—which seems intended to designate this figure as an Apollo (Stewart 1990, 163, pl. 383–385). So in the latter case we even seem to have a change of subject, from mortal athlete to divinity. In the replica of the “Meleager” in the Vatican, on the other hand, we see that the copyist has added the head of the Calydonian boar and a cloak; a cloak that flutters out to the side in a manner quite alien to the art of the fourth century BCE (Stewart 1990, 185, pl. 549). Such modifications (and some much more radical than these, involving varying head types, gestures, and so on) have been seen as evidence of a remarkably assertive and self-confident attitude, on the part of the copyists, toward the classical models from which they were working; an attitude that required that their creations be described as something other than “copies.”

The first step was to give the material a new name. In the 1970s, German scholarship came up with the designation “Römische Idealplastik” (“Roman ideal statuary”: Wünsche 1972), so that one could explicitly drop the reference to Greek models and subject matter. Next, arguments were advanced that we should understand all the “copies” of Greek works not as *reproductions*, but as self-conscious attempts to *rival* the old masters of the classical period, improving on their work, appropriating their masterpieces, and creating from them something *new* and better (Wünsche 1972; Preisshofen and Zanker 1970/71; Zanker 1974). This approach was taken up with enthusiasm for a while in Germany, but then just as quickly abandoned as it emerged more and more clearly that the ancient evidence could not support this interpretation. Nevertheless, these developments in Germany have bequeathed to us in the English-speaking world what must be counted as the dominant approach to this material at the current time. Brunilde Ridgway, Elaine Gazda, Ellen Perry, and Miranda Marvin (among others) have all become strong proponents of this view. They have sought to make the surviving statues more acceptable to modern audiences by asserting first of all that they are *not* copies: Elaine Gazda titled one of her review articles “Roman copies: The unmaking of a modern myth” (Gazda 1995a); while Miranda Marvin speaks explicitly of the modern “copy myth” (Marvin 2008). Next, they have argued that even where we have a whole series of statues that reproduce a particular prototype (like the figures that we have been considering), this prototype is just as likely a Roman contemporary creation in classical style as a Greek classical original (Gazda 1995b, 133). The whole phenomenon has been dubbed “Roman emulation,” to emphasize that such works should not be thought of as merely derivative, but exercises in self-conscious creativity. Gazda’s volume of essays broadly advocating this new approach appeared in 2004,

entitled *The Ancient Art of Emulation: Studies in Artistic Originality and Tradition from the Present to Classical Antiquity*. This idea is carried further, and more systematically developed, in Perry (2005).

These scholars are right, of course, that all these marble villa furnishings are not copies in the modern sense; that is, the kind of museum reproductions that we might desire of a famous artistic masterpiece. This was pointed out in the early decades of the twentieth century by Georg Lippold (1917 and 1923) and has always been acknowledged. Lippold devised a long (and somewhat bewildering) list of terms for describing the different kinds of relationship that Roman copies can have to the Greek works that they reproduce. However, in just about every other respect the current drive to render this material more palatable to modern tastes by asserting its “originality” and its essential “Romanness”—or non-Greekness—could not be more misguided. I have advanced a number of criticisms of this approach elsewhere, which I shall not repeat here (Hallett 2005a, esp. 30–35; see also Kousser 2008), except to add one observation. What the elaborate arguments of all this contemporary scholarship reveal is just how problematic we find these sculptures, when trying to reconcile them with our modern ideas about art.

Some Proposals for Redefining Roman Art for Modern Audiences

The figural arts of the Roman world are better termed “visual culture”

It should be clear by now that I regard the strange situation in which the discipline finds itself as stemming in large part from the modern category “Roman art.” Furthermore, we can sidestep many of the problems we have simply by discarding this category, and speaking instead of “Roman visual culture,” as some have already started to do (e.g., Clarke 2007). The term “visual culture” was apparently coined by Michael Baxandall in the mid-1980s, and introduced to the profession at large by Svetlana Alpers in her book *The Art of Describing* (Alpers 1983, xxv). It was subsequently picked up by others, notably the post-structuralist art historians Norman Bryson, Michael-Ann Holly, and Keith Moxey, in the title of a collection of essays that they published in 1994. These authors, however, employ the term in a rather different sense from Baxandall and Alpers (Bryson, Holly, and Moxey 1994, see esp. xvi–xvii). They propose that we should speak of “visual culture” in order to replace the “History of Art” with a “History of Images,” and in this way avoid perpetuating the many unspoken assumptions and prejudices that inevitably accompany the term “art” in modern art-historical writing. In the last 20 years it is fair to say that there has been a real surge in the number of studies in art history that have adopted this term—as far as I can tell, largely for the reasons just mentioned. And whether or not one accepts this general position, the designation “visual culture” seems ideally suited to help scholars of ancient art with the special problems presented by the Roman period. Now, it may be that in time the term will also generate difficulties of its own (problems of definition in particular), but let me start by listing some of

its obvious advantages.

First, all of the products of the visual arts in the Roman period are part of “Roman visual culture.” We do not have to decide which works are really “Roman,” in some sense, and which are not. Accordingly, *all* of the works from a Roman building, like a villa, a theater, a nymphaeum, or a public bath, can be studied on equal terms. We do not have to divide them up into contemporary portraits, representations of members of the imperial family, historical reliefs, victories with trophies, friezes of captured weapons, and the like (which would be “Roman” in our eyes); and gods, mythological subjects, portraits of famous Greek writers and philosophers, and copies of famous classical statues (which would be “Greek”). We do not have to worry about the ethnic origins of the artists who made all these works. Romans evidently did not. As we saw earlier, Virgil’s Anchises stated it bluntly (*Aeneid* 6.847–48): “*Others* will hammer out bronze till it is soft and breathes, and draw forth from marble living faces.” *Others*, not Romans. Or as Cicero expressed it, more prosaically, in conversation with L. Lucullus (Cicero, *On Academic Skepticism* 2.86): “Few men become great artists”; he continues, “—few *indeed* among our race” (*nostri generis*; see also *ibid.* 2.20.) The word that Cicero uses for artist in this exchange is *artifex*—and he is referring specifically to painters and flute players. If Romans were deeply concerned that there had been no great painters or sculptors of Roman stock, they left no record of it in their literature. For our purposes, whether the artists were Greeks, Romans—or even Spaniards or Gauls—all were perfectly capable of contributing to Roman visual culture. And finally, and for what I have to say in the rest of this chapter, most importantly: all of those *Greek* old masterpieces, avidly acquired and set up in Roman temples and public places, are also properly part of *Roman* visual culture. Moreover, I would contend that for understanding how that visual culture works, they are arguably the most crucial part of it. I shall return to this point below.

German scholarship and the mutually exclusive spheres of otium and negotium

What we have designated the “Greek” part of Roman visual culture has unquestionably been best studied over the last 40 years or so in Germany. In the late 1970s, Paul Zanker—in several influential articles—pioneered a number of new ways of thinking about this material and reconstructing the function that it served in Roman life (e.g., Zanker 1975 and 1979). A whole new approach was born that seemed to define and delimit an entirely new domain of Roman art (e.g., Neudecker 1988; Clarke 1991; Gazda 1991; Wallace-Hadrill 1994). The focus of all of this work was, to a large extent, the sculpture and wall paintings that were specifically produced for Roman homes and villas; and this material was then used to shed light on Roman villa culture and the realm of *otium* (leisure), which in Roman thinking was directly opposed to *negotium* (the world of business, politics, and public service). Similar work has also been done on Roman mosaics (Muth 1998). The evidence from the visual arts has proved extremely valuable for our understanding of how Romans articulated for themselves a realm apart from the public and political arena, which could be devoted to *otium*: what we might term “private life.” However, while this approach has been immensely fruitful, it has to some extent perpetuated the long-standing division of the visual arts in the Roman period into two spheres

—private and public, *otium* and *negotium*—with two discrete sets of visual imagery, Greek and Roman, respectively. Zanker used this division into private and public, for example, as the leading organizational principle in what was—until very recently—the best modern account of Roman art: his entry “Arte Romana” in the new supplements to the *Enciclopedia dell’Arte Antica* (EAA: Zanker 1971–94; the best general account is now Zanker 2007/2008/2010); the EAA entry forms the cornerstone of two of Zanker’s most important subsequent essays (1991 and 2000). Despite the undeniable advances in our knowledge that have resulted from the approach, we thus still find the “Greek” material generally separated off from the “Roman” and studied in separate monographs—now as “the art of the private sphere” (e.g., Gazda 1991).

On closer analysis, however, this division cannot hold. For while it is true that Roman houses and villas very seldom contain much of the “public” imagery of Roman visual culture (portraits of the owner’s family being a conspicuous exception), Greek mythological and religious imagery simply cannot be separated from the Roman public sphere. A few well-known examples will suffice to make the point here.

In the Republican period, one of the best-known public monuments to have survived is the so-called Altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus (really a monumental base; [Figure 10.1](#)). On one side it has a Marine thiasos, the wedding of Neptune and Aphitrite—Greek subject matter, straight out of the Hellenistic repertoire—on the other a Roman sacrifice and census scene. And at the very founding of the empire, the first emperor Augustus deployed a large number of Greek classical *originals* in his renewal of the capital city. He set up a bronze Zeus by the sculptor Leochares as the cult image of his temple to *Jupiter Tonans* on the Capitoline hill; we even know what this looked like from its representation on a contemporary coin (Pliny, *Natural History* 34.79; Zanker 1988, 108, fig. 89a). He placed a colossal Zeus by Myron in its own shrine in the area of the Capitolium (Strabo 14.14). He used a statue by Skopas as the cult image for his temple to Apollo on the Palatine (Pliny, *Natural History* 36.25), of which some small fragments survive (Tomei 1997, 47, no. 26–27; Martin 1987, 262–263, cat. 118). He also deployed archaic works in marble, by the Greek sculptors Bupalus and Athenis, as acroteria on the same building (Pliny, *Natural History* 36.13); a number of terracotta plaques survive from this sanctuary, also worked in archaic style (Tomei 1997, 49–53, no. 29a–f; Strazzulla 1990). In the peristyle that served as a forecourt to the temple, Augustus set up images of the 50 daughters of Danaus. They were represented as water carriers, holding water vessels on their heads, doing penance in Hades for the murder of their husbands. Three of these survive, and show that the figures took the form of hip-herms, which served as caryatids (though they cannot have had any serious architectural function; Tomei 1991, 56–57, nos. 31–33; Balensiefen 1995). They are broadly early classical in style. In the temple of Apollo Sosianus, on the other hand, built by Gaius Sosius in the 20s BCE, Greek original sculptures of the fifth century BCE served as the pedimental decoration (La Rocca 1985). The figures depict a battle between Greeks and Amazons, and were presumably taken from a classical Greek temple, although it is not known which. Sosius’ temple is also said to have contained a number of famous old masters, including works by the sculptor Praxiteles and the painter Aristides (Pliny, *Natural History* 36.28, 35.99).

The emperor Tiberius, when he dedicated the temple of Concordia in the Roman Forum, positively filled it with Greek old masters: statues by Euphranor and Sthennis; paintings by Nikias and Zeuxis. Furthermore, Tiberius apparently compelled the inhabitants of the island of Naxos to sell him—much against their will—an antique statue of Hestia for this temple (Dio Cassius 55.9.6). From representations of the temple on contemporary coins, it can be seen that the entrance to the temple was flanked by colossal nude statues of Mercury and Hercules—the Hercules recognizable as a Greek type known in replicas (Vermeule 1957, 284). To cite a later example too, Vespasian's temple of Peace was also a veritable museum of Greek masterpieces. And the architectural ornament in all these fora and temple complexes, including figural friezes, was, of course, predominantly Greek in conception and subject matter. The beautifully carved frieze in [Figure 1.3](#), for example, is from the Forum of Trajan (see also the frieze from the temple of Divus Julius: Heilmeyer 1988, 373–374, cat. 206). However, one only needs to cite the example of the fifth-century BCE caryatids from the Erechtheion on the Athenian Acropolis replicated in the Forum of Augustus to make the point (Heilmeyer 1988, 186–189, fig. 85).



Figure 1.3 Frieze from the Forum of Trajan. Rome, Vatican Museum. Museo Pio Gregoriano Profano, no. 9760.

Photo: Vatican Museums.

In short, the public places of the capital were completely permeated with Greek and Hellenistic forms and subject matter. What we sometimes call “official art” is no different. On Roman coins of all periods we routinely find portraits on one side and images of the gods on the other, which reproduce Greek types and Greek styles. In [Figure 1.4](#), for example, we see an

image of the goddess Spes in Greek archaic style, on the reverse of a superb bronze sestertius of Claudius. Even the image of the emperor as supreme commander was not exempt. The imperial parade armor was often decorated with flying Victories, Centaurs carrying trophies, Nereids riding on sea monsters, the chariot of the sun god, and so on. Rarely the armor even carries representations of Greek myths (Stemmer 1978). The magnificent bronze cuirassed portrait of Germanicus found in Amelia (just outside Rome), for example, has on the breastplate an impressive depiction of the sea monster Scylla and the killing of Troilus by Achilles (Marinis 2002, 133–135, no. 24).



Figure 1.4 Bronze sestertertius of the emperor Claudius, 41–42 CE, showing on the reverse the image of the goddess Spes in archaic style, accompanied by the legend SPES AVGVSTA.

Photo: Ex Nomos Auction 7, 15 May 2013, lot 160.

Romans themselves evidently thought of all of this imagery—including the Greek old masters—as part of a single system. In the center of the Forum Iulium Julius Caesar set up an equestrian statue of Alexander the Great by Lysippos; but he had Alexander’s head replaced with his own portrait (Status, *Silvae* 1.1.84–85). And in the Augustan Forum Augustus set up two famous paintings by Apelles, each depicting Alexander the Great in an allegorical scene.

In these paintings too the emperor Claudius eventually replaced the portrait features of Alexander with those of Augustus (Pliny, *Natural History* 35.93–94). We could not have a clearer indication that antique artworks like these were *part of the program*. In fact, the unity of Roman visual culture for which I am arguing here is actually embodied in the genre of Roman nude portraits ([Figure 1.5](#); Hallett 2005b). In such figures a portrait head—in [Figure 1.5](#) that of the emperor Hadrian—is sometimes combined with the body of a classical type, in this case a fifth-century figure of Ares/Mars. To modern eyes this seems a hybrid—a combination of incompatible elements. Yet, the number of surviving examples (more than 300 such statues survive, most over life size), and the fact that such figures are found at *all* levels of Roman art, from gorgeous court cameos right down to the humble funerary altars of Roman freedmen, makes it clear that this kind of image was a natural and accepted form of self-representation in the Roman world. Such portraits, whether depictions on gems or cameos or statues in the round, reveal that even at the highest levels of “official art” we cannot sustain any kind of separation between the “Greek” and “Roman” parts of Roman art. They are part of the same *visual culture*. They are inextricably bound together in a single system of representation.

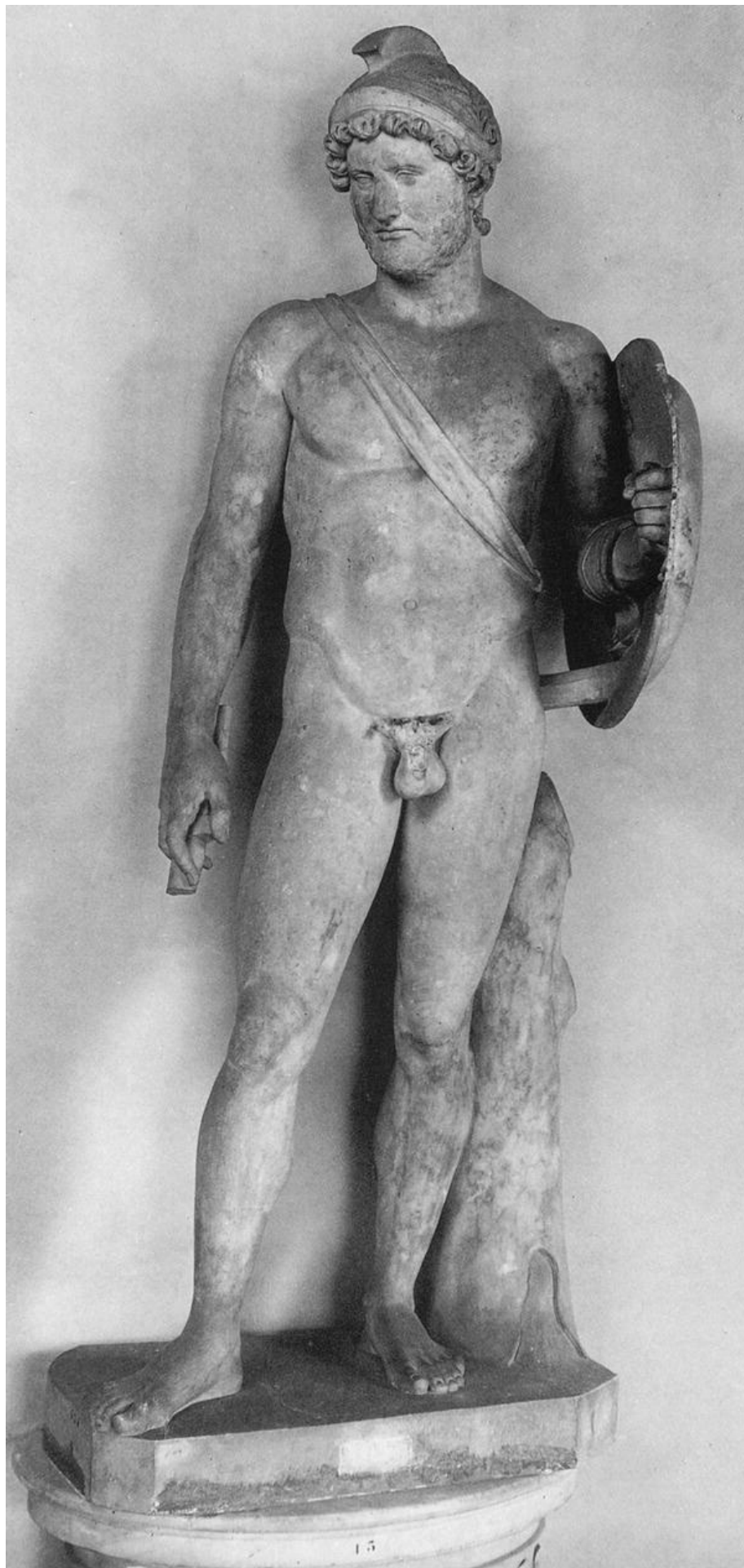


Figure 1.5 Over-lifesize statue of the emperor Hadrian portrayed with the attributes of Mars. Rome, Capitoline Museum, Salone 13, inv. 634.

Photo: Sansaini, Neg. D-DAI-ROM-55.275.

Summary of the argument so far

Before I present my conclusion, let me sum up the argument so far. In the first part of this chapter I addressed our current restrictive definition of Roman art; a definition that has resulted in a separation of artworks produced in the Roman period into “Greek” and “Roman” categories. The study of the “Greek” category (in recent decades) as part of the study of Roman *otium* or private life—while it has been very fruitful in some ways—has actually perpetuated a division of material along the same old lines. I then argued that these separate categories that we have created within Roman artistic production cannot be sustained. On closer scrutiny they quickly collapse into one another, and they must be accepted as parts of the same visual culture. This is something that is visually symbolized for us in the genre of the Roman nude portrait, where “Greek” and “Roman” elements are united in a single powerful image ([Figure 1.5](#)).

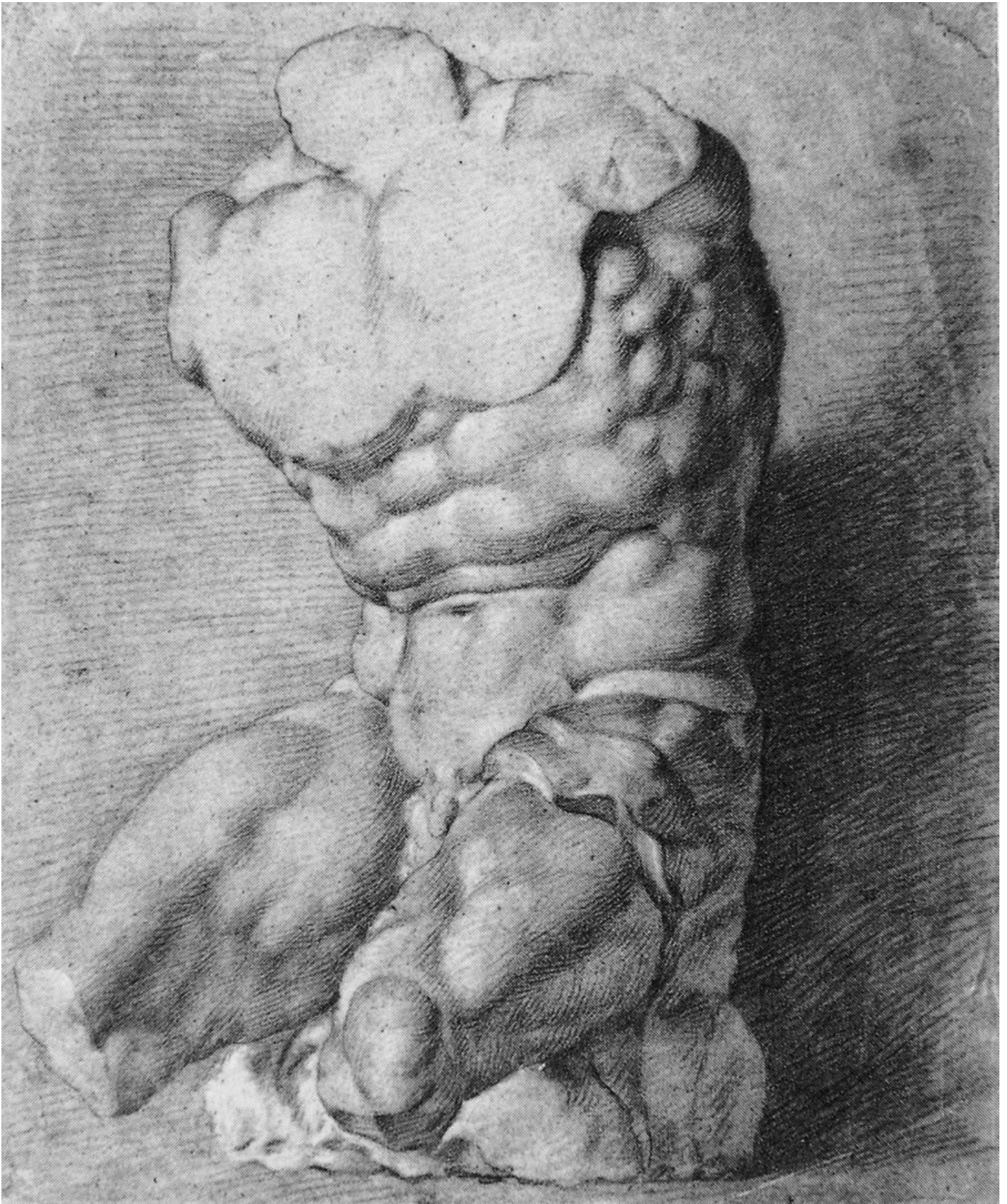


Figure 1.6 Red chalk drawing of Belvedere Torso, signed by Mattheus Verheijden, 1714; Hamburg, Art Market. Drawing: *Meisterzeichnungen*, 1993, Nr. 13. Courtesy of Martin Moeller-Pisani.

In addition, I advocated that the large numbers of classical Greek originals—the old master paintings and sculptures displayed in the public places of Rome and in private collections—should also be included in our definition of Roman visual culture. This may seem a somewhat radical step. However, it is perhaps no more radical than suggesting, for example, that from the mid-sixteenth to the end of the nineteenth century a whole collection of famous *Roman* statues—such as the Apollo Belvedere, the Laocoön, and the Belvedere Torso ([Figure 1.6](#))—were properly part of a pan-European visual culture. That is to name only three. It is no exaggeration to say that these *Roman* works, survivals from antiquity, played an extraordinarily important role in the development of European visual culture for the next 300 years. I am thinking here, of course, of the material collected and studied by Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny in their book *Taste and the Antique* (Haskell and Penny 1981).

A New Model for Understanding Roman Art

The Roman reception of Greek art is the missing center of Roman visual culture

So what is to be gained by taking the step that I am proposing? At the beginning of this chapter I claimed that our current restrictive definition of Roman art has prevented us from perceiving the links and associations that unite all of its products. Otto Brendel wrote in 1979:

The more examples of the diverse genres of Roman art that are collected between the covers of one book, the more difficult it is to align them sensibly with one another.

(1979, 146)

This is just as true now as it was then. What does the development that we see in the decoration of sarcophagi have to do with the stylistic evolution of mosaics? What do the changing styles of wall painting have to do with the development of Roman historical relief? Very little. The most important result of putting all of the artistic production of the Roman world back together, and viewing it whole, is that in this way it becomes intelligible as a *system*. Here, I take my lead from the pioneering work of Tonio Hölscher on reading Roman official art as a kind of *Bildsprache*, or “visual language” (Hölscher 1987/2004). The various genres of what we call “Roman art” are often not very clearly related to one another in style and in form, but they are all natural outgrowths of the Roman admiration for—and appropriation of—the Greek tradition. In other words, the Roman *reception* of Greek art is the “missing center” of Roman visual culture. At this point I wish to distinguish my position strongly from that of Hölscher: it is not simply the relationship with the various earlier styles and monuments of Greek art that provides the key to understanding Roman visual culture. It is the Roman *reception* of Greek art *tout court*—the use that the Romans made of Greek artworks, the *function* that all this redeployed Greek art served in Roman society—that is the missing center of the entire system, I would argue.

A plurality of styles illuminated from the center

The existence in Roman art of very different styles of representation side by side on the same monument has often been remarked on (Brendel 1979, 130–137). In the past it has been felt to be particularly frustrating that Roman art does not exhibit a uniform stylistic progression. We should replace our unrealistic expectation of regular stylistic progression with a “centripetal” model: one with the Greek tradition set firmly at its center. The various genres of Roman monument continually draw from this fixed center, as well as from earlier works in the same genre. Thus, works widely separated in date may have much more in common with one another, or with earlier works of Greek art, than they do with contemporary works. The battle friezes from the Arch at Orange in southern France (Amy et al. 1962)—reliefs that adorn a monument dated by its inscription to the reign of Tiberius ([Figure 1.7](#))—can be compared with Roman battle sarcophagi, such as the “Portonaccio sarcophagus,” the “Ludovisi sarcophagus,” or the example shown in [Figure 1.8](#), all usually dated more than a century later. The reliefs on the arch and those on the sarcophagi owe their family resemblance to a shared use of Hellenistic pictorial conventions for representing battles. None of them, on the other hand, has much in common with representations of Roman imperial processions of any date (e.g., [Figures 2.4, 10.10](#)). Those drew on a different set of Greek models, and are aimed at a different effect.

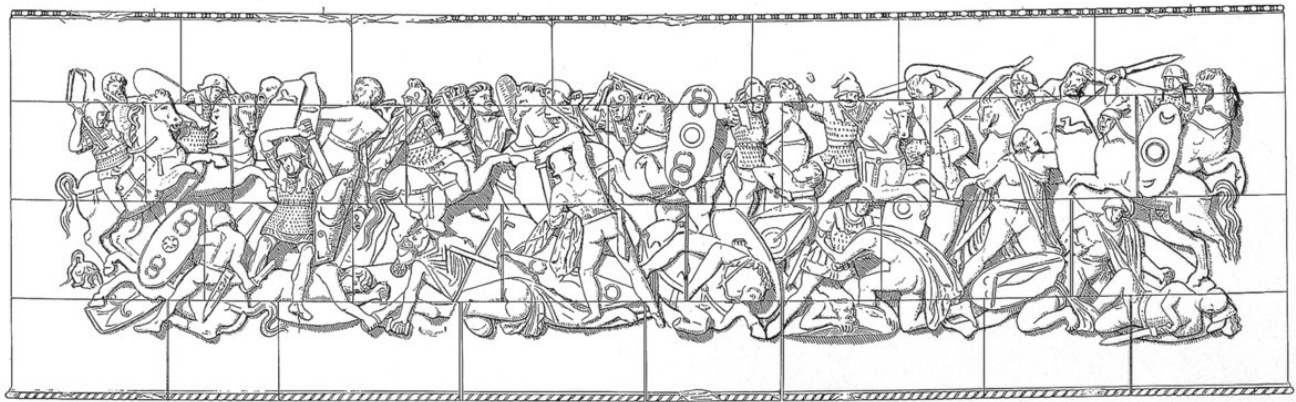
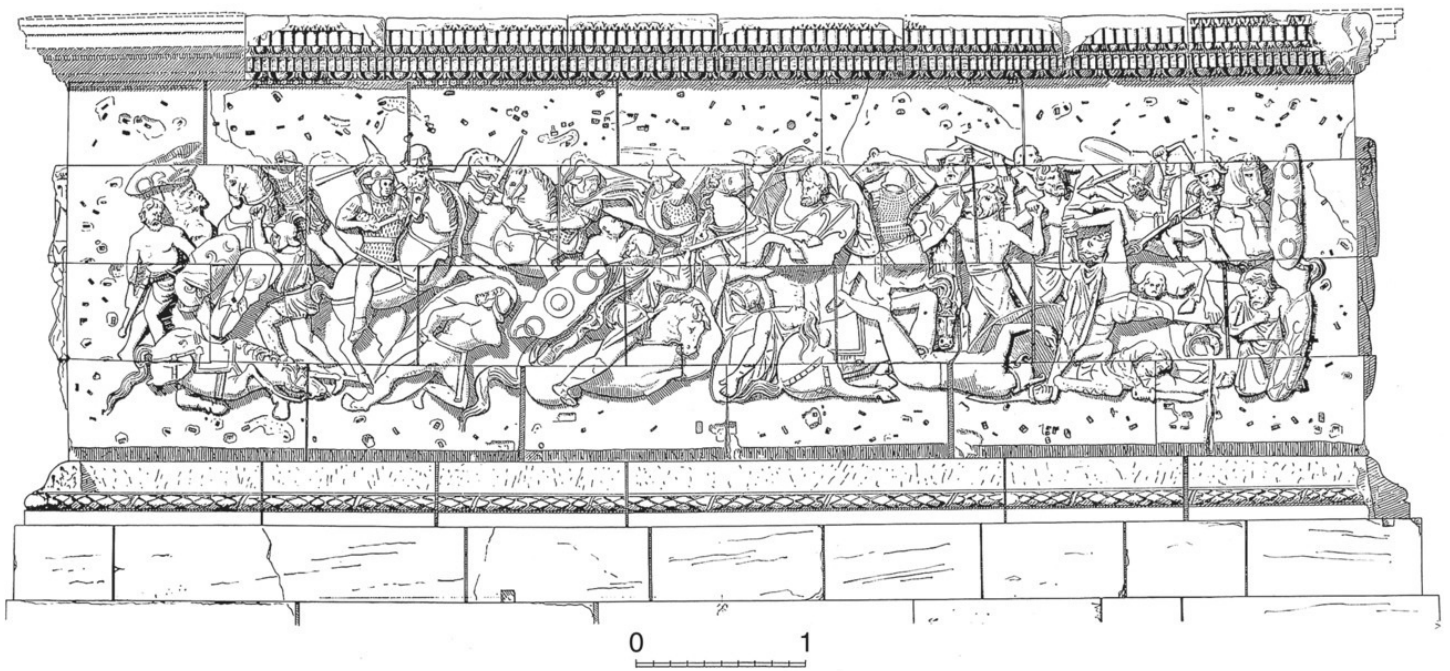


Figure 1.7 Line drawing of a relief from the second attic of the Arch of Tiberius at Orange.

After: *L'Arc d'Orange* by Robert Amy et al. (suppl. Gallia, XV, pl. 28) © CNRS Editions.



Figure 1.8 Sarcophagus with relief carving showing a battle between Greeks and Galatians. Rome, Museo Capitolino, inv. S 213. Photo: Archäologisches Institut, Cologne Digital Archaeology Laboratory, Universität zu Köln, Mal1683-01_16417,03 (www.arachne.uni-koeln.de).

It is very important that my aims here are not misunderstood. I am well aware that in endeavoring to search for the “center” of Roman art and to see it “whole,” as a “unity,” I am moving in the opposite direction from many art historians in other areas of the discipline. Many of my colleagues in the History of Art department at the University of California at Berkeley, for example, are expressly trying to write a decentered art history, which emphasizes a plurality of voices, agendas, and receptions. I applaud this effort, and the last thing I want to do for Roman visual culture is to give the impression that it is monolithic. Nothing could be further from the truth. In many ways this was a mass culture, a culture of mass production; its characteristic imagery is employed by very different levels of society, and is found in private homes and modest tombs as well as imperial fora and luxury villas. Many sections of the population have a role and a share in this culture, and all of them can—and should—be taken into account. However, what I *am* arguing is that the artistic production of the Roman period has *never* been studied all together, and it is only by seeing all of this material as belonging to the same larger cultural phenomenon that we will be able to understand its special expressive qualities: as a “representational language”—what the Germans call *Bildsprache*, although for a number of reasons I think that it is better described as a distinctive “visual culture,” rather than a “representational language.”

How Roman visual culture works

Let me present a thumbnail sketch of how I think Roman visual culture actually works. For the

Romans, all the visual arts of the Greek tradition, from archaic to late Hellenistic, were simultaneously present. In fact, the same situation may be perceived in Roman literature. The whole of the Greek literary past may be perceived as simultaneously present in the writings of Virgil, for example. In the *Aeneid* the Roman poet draws on pre-classical Homeric epic, classical tragedy, Hellenistic cosmology—and even elegy. The kind of epic that he creates blends elements drawn from many different periods of Greek literature. Greek art of all periods was to be seen in every Roman sanctuary and temple, not to mention every sanctuary or agora of the Hellenistic world. The Romans and the artists who worked for them appropriated all the styles of the Greek past for their own purposes. Just as in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in England for example, there was a Greek Revival, a Gothic Revival, the early Renaissance art of the Pre-Raphaelites, and a broadly Palladian style of architecture, each with its own stylistic models and historical associations, so for the Romans all of the styles of the Greek past could be employed wherever the context seemed to demand it. Nevertheless, whereas in nineteenth-century Europe Romantic aesthetics came to abhor this kind of historical eclecticism, and idealized stylistic *purity* and *originality* instead, the Romans developed a visual culture in which the selective revival of earlier styles and forms was *the defining principle*, a visual culture in which styles could be mixed and matched to order. That is how it is that Roman artists are able to combine different “period styles” in one and the same composition (as in the imperial portrait in [Figure 1.5](#)); or, in another example, no less striking than the nude portraits, the relief in [Figure 1.9](#), where the gods Apollo, Diana, and Leto, seen against a backdrop of their sanctuary, receive a libation from a winged Victory. The gods are worked in the relief style of the late archaic period (ca. 500 BCE) and appear on tip-toe, hovering like apparitions, while the sanctuary is rendered in the illusionistic style of a Hellenistic landscape painting.



Figure 1.9 Marble relief panel depicting a libation offering made before the Apolline Triad. Rome, Villa Albani, inv. 1014.

Photo: Museum für Abgüsse Klassischer Bildwerke, Munich, Photothek.

I will conclude with a mid-nineteenth century Italian statue that I came across at the *Scala Santa*, in the old Lateran palace in Rome ([Figure 1.10](#)). If you want a demonstration of how Roman visual culture actually works, then this statue provides a perfect example. Here we see Christ before Pontius Pilate, Pilate turning to address the crowd. Notice that the Roman governor is depicted in perfect Republican, or early imperial, *veristic* style, while for the figure of Christ the sculptor has drawn on a number of sources—including early Christian and Byzantine images of the savior—even incorporating a bronze halo! Each figure is thus rendered in a historical style appropriate to the subject, and the sculptor does not appear to be worried about combining models and styles from different periods. It is no accident, of course, that the sculptor of this work, Ignazio Jacometti, is today totally unregarded. Late nineteenth- and twentieth-century critics roundly condemned this kind of eclecticism, and it has disappeared almost without trace from our art-history textbooks. However, in Roman times stylistic eclecticism of this sort became the basis of a whole visual culture, which continued for more than 300 years. In my view the history of that culture may have a special interest for us now, in the post-modern era, as “the path not taken”; and I believe that we have now

reached a stage in the study of Roman art when that story can finally be told.



Figure 1.10 “Ecce Homo,” Christ before Pilate; statue by Ignazio Jacometti, 1854; Rome, Scala Santa, St. John the Lateran.

Photo: Gregor Borg.

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

On the history of the problem, see especially Brendel (1979). On the relationship of Roman art with earlier Greek art, Hölscher (2004) and Zanker (2010) are most relevant. On Roman looting and collecting of Greek artworks, see Pape (1975), Alsop (1982), Chevallier (1991), Bounia (2004), and Miles (2008). On original Greek artworks on display in Rome, see especially Pollitt (1978), Strong (1994), Celani (1998), and Rutledge (2012). On the replication of Greek art in the Roman period, see Gazda (2004), Hallett (2005a), Perry (2005), Kousser (2008), and Marvin (2008).

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CHAPTER 2

Roman Historical Representations

Tonio Hölscher

The traditional view holds that Roman art is strongly characterized by individual and historical realism. Indeed, Roman portraits are the most striking representations of historical individuals prior to the modern age; and the reliefs on Trajan's and Marcus Aurelius' columns are the most extensive pictorial documentations of wars that survive from the ancient world. Such "historical monuments" are undoubtedly essential phenomena of Roman art and culture—but this is a truism that explains very little. On the one hand, the terms "historical" and "history" are ambiguous: crucial is the specific conception of "history" that actually characterizes Roman "historical" monuments. On the other hand, "history" is not an autonomous "cultural" phenomenon, but is conceived and implemented in social, political, and religious practice. In the context of this chapter, it is therefore necessary to investigate the purposes of "historical" monuments and the use of "history" and memory in the public lives of Romans. (For a compendium of Roman historical reliefs from the imperial period, see Koeppel 1983–1992.)

"History" is never purely factual documentation of a past "reality": every society conceives its own history, with a focus on specific themes, persons, and events. Yet, every society also has its own *type* of history that might accentuate great individuals and events, or more general processes, social institutions, or cultural practices. Every society also has multiple types of history that exist in different media: a history of myths, critical historiography, public and private monuments and images, and so on. What histories and what type of historicity did the Romans bring to bear in their political monuments?

In 101 BCE, after the Roman victory over the Cimbri at Vercellae, the Roman general Quintus Lutatius Catulus erected a temple on the Campus Martius to *Fortuna huiusce diei*, the goddess of fortune of the day on which the battle had been fought, July 30. It was a monument to glorious memory, evoked by a regularly repeating state cult—but the building itself contained no specific information about the event that was to be remembered. The temple used the general forms of Greek and Roman architecture; the goddess Fortuna was a very general and timeless concept of military success, her colossal cult statue followed a traditional typology, and only the verbal addendum "*Fortuna of This Day*" linked the goddess to the historical battle. To a large extent, "history" is seen here in a meta-historical way (*LTUR* III, 269–270).

Essentially, the specific (and especially the specific nature of historical persons and events) can only be understood and represented in generalizing categories. As soon as specific events of the past stop being described as "pure facts" and start to be interpreted and presented as phenomena of "history," as evidence of political power, legitimate success, or self-inflicted defeat, general concepts come into play that increasingly transcend the individual events and persons. Such abstract concepts include "politics" and "religion," "ideology" and "identity." These general conditions that affect every concept of "history" are particularly prominent in

Rome's public monuments.

History of Scholarship and Current Perspectives

Bishops of the Middle Ages, artists of the Renaissance, and monarchs and dictators of the modern age have imitated and copied the great monuments of ancient Rome, such as the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, or the arch of Constantine.

Modern research on Roman “historical reliefs” distinctly reflects the changes in scholarly approaches (Bergmann 1991). From the classicistic perspective that was the legacy of Johann Joachim Winckelmann, art produced by the Roman state was of no interest. During the nineteenth century, monuments erected to emperors were first interpreted within a concept of rigorous historicism as faithful representations of reality. Conrad Cichorius (1896–1900), a student of Theodor Mommsen, therefore used the reliefs on Trajan's Column ([Figure 2.1](#)), including all their details of landscape, architecture, troops, and military action, to reconstruct Trajan's Dacian Wars. National interests partly informed such historical inquiries: the publication and study of the new Parisian casts of Trajan's column by Wilhelm Fröhner (1872–1874) stood in the service of Napoleon III's interests; the deluxe edition of the column of Marcus resulted from an interest in the oldest evidence of the Germans, and was dedicated to the German Emperor Wilhelm II (Petersen, von Domaszewski, and Calderini 1896). In response, a sharp counter-reaction set in around 1900, promoted by Franz Wickhoff and Alois Riegl, the influential leaders of the Viennese School of art history, and based on the experience of formal autonomy in contemporary art. Accordingly, Karl Lehmann-Hartleben (1926) studied the formal conventions that shaped Trajan's Column and assessed its value as historical evidence as rather inferior.



Figure 2.1 Rome, Column of Trajan, lower section.

Photo: Fototeca Unione, American Academy in Rome.

In the 1960s, a new generation of scholars started to approach the monuments with an interest in their political messages, and understood them as factors in the practice of power (Borg 2005). Already in the prior generation, Andreas Alföldi had interpreted the ceremonial contexts and the garb of the Emperors on public monuments as means of representing dominance (Alföldi 1934 and 1935); at the same time, Gerhard Rodenwaldt (1935) interpreted depictions of generals on sarcophagi not as actual biographical information, but as embodiments of political virtues. Building on their approach, the great imperial monuments were now investigated for their political ideology (Fittschen 1972; Torelli 1982). At first, this ideological interpretation was placed in bristling opposition to the view that they represented historical reality. In response to this antithetical view, a concept of a dialectical relationship between reality and ideology was eventually proposed: on the one hand, historical reality is represented in categories of political ideology; and on the other, state ideology manifests in political reality (Hölscher 1980a; Settis 1985). This new perspective on the political messages initially led to a strong emphasis on iconography over style; soon, however, the formal qualities also came back into view as strategies used to achieve certain visual effects. Likewise, the reliefs were no longer seen as isolated “pictures,” but as parts of larger architectural monuments, and within their broader urban context. As a result, not only the patron but also the viewer is recognized as a significant factor in our understanding of the monuments (Zanker 1994 and 2000; Elsner 1995).

At the same time, starting with Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli, the public representational art of other social strata began to be considered: the public self-representation of the local upper classes in Italian cities, ambitious freedmen in Rome, and, ultimately, the magistrates of the city of Rome (Bianchi Bandinelli 1967a; Zanker 1970–1971; Schäfer 1989). In contrast to the Greek-style official art of the emperors and the senate, the documentary pictorial language of these monuments, initially interpreted by G. Rodenwaldt as “popular art,” was now defined by Bianchi Bandinelli as “arte plebea” (Rodenwaldt 1940; Bianchi Bandinelli 1967a). However, it has been argued of late that there was no genuine “freedman art” and that the forms in question were employed across social strata as a “presentational style” with semantic content; that is, as a specific formal repertoire of easily readable pictorial presentation for specific themes of social and religious relevance (Petersen 2006; the term is introduced in Hölscher 2012).

Recently, a better understanding of the practice of erecting public monuments has produced a fundamental change in their interpretation. While the political representation of emperors, officeholders, and dignitaries was previously interpreted as “propaganda” and public “self-representation,” a closer look at their patrons, and the rules and standards of dedicatory practice, resulted in a more nuanced view. Public monuments were not ordinarily commissioned by the actual person depicted, but rather by another party (senate, cities, supporters, and so on) as an honor *for* them, even if in response to the honoree’s expectations (Mayer 2002; Dally 2008; von den Hoff 2009). In this way, the monuments become indicators

of a negotiated consensus between elite and community. Funerary representation is more personal, although it was also determined by general social norms.

These new approaches since the 1960s have also led to a change in terminology. Given that the images are not aiming at factual documentation of events but at glorification of achievements, the term “historical relief” has often been replaced by the term “state relief.” The insights into the practice of monument dedication have discredited as misleading the terms public “self-representation” and “propaganda,” which were coined for the manipulation of popular opinion by modern states. The term “representational art” is more neutral, albeit less concise (Bergmann 2000).

The following paragraphs will address the question of the representation of historical reality and political ideology in public monuments from various perspectives, and examine the respective interference between specific and general tendencies.

Historical Memory and Political Practice

One decisive motivation for the representation of historical reality in public monuments arises from the necessity of transforming one-time political achievements into enduring political power (Hölscher 2006). Successes in battle and administrative measures by Republican statesmen and, above all, emperors were one-time events connected with a particular location, often far removed from the political centers of the Empire. If the glory of such achievements was to support political power, then the greatest possible portion of the population would have to participate in it for the longest time possible: the glory had to be permanently disseminated across space and time. Based on these premises, a complex practice of political representation developed, in which collective rituals and public monuments played a central role (Hölscher 2006).

Monuments with figurative images had already been erected to the glory and memory of rulers, often in the sacred contexts of sanctuaries and tombs, in the Ancient Near East and Egypt. Since 500 BCE, city states and leading statesmen in Greece erected public monuments to the memory of “historical” persons and events, which were meant to stabilize political power. Statues, reliefs, and paintings in political and sacred spaces presented individuals and achievements of the past as models for the present and the future. They were inspired by a concept of “history” that was characterized by glorious singular achievements, such as the Greco-Persian wars, and individuals, such as Themistocles and Alexander the Great (Hölscher 2003). Alongside that, a form of representative art arose in fourth-century BCE Etruria in the tombs of the elite, producing paintings in burial chambers and reliefs on sarcophagi and urns that the leading families used to demonstrate their power. Ritual appearances of high-ranking magistrates are particularly prominent, especially public processions in which the deceased demonstrate their high social and political status in a standardized form (Holliday 2002).

Both traditions were greatly significant for Roman representational art, whose origins lay in the fourth and third centuries BCE. Its main preconditions were Rome’s expansion from a polis into a territorial state, and the rise of a new political elite, the nobility, which bore the new

imperial policy.

During the Roman Republic, public monuments were important factors in the distribution of merit and power between the community (*res publica*) and leading statesmen. They were part of an extensive practice of political memory in which the significance of persons and events for the state was codified both for the present and for the future. This led to a tense conflict between individuals and the community that determined the specific political character of these monuments.

Starting with Rome's rise as a significant power, the state needed the conceptual leadership of outstanding personalities who then claimed recognition for their outstanding achievements, especially military victories; on the other hand, the community had to ensure that these men did not break up the collective equality of the ruling class. This balance was pursued through a practice of mutual recognition: the senate and the people honored victorious generals with the ephemeral honor of the triumphal procession, and the permanent honorary statues in the forum and in other public spaces. For their part, the generals could furnish the triumphal procession with spectacular evidence of their military campaigns: models of conquered cities; personifications of subjugated nations, mountains, and rivers; images of defeated opponents; depictions of battles; panels with written commentaries, and so on. This familiarized the population of the city of Rome with the military successes. Moreover, the generals were able to perpetuate their glory in the city by their own initiative: through public display of spoils, such as the prows of the ships captured at Antium (338 BCE) that decorated the speakers' platform on the forum; or through paintings of wars in public places, such as the depiction of a battle against Hieron of Syracuse and the Carthaginians on the exterior wall of the senatorial curia (263 BCE). Finally, the generals were obligated to use a portion of their war spoils (*manubiae*) for the welfare of the community. They primarily fulfilled this obligation by erecting temples to deities that had played a role in the war. In that way, the temples became monuments to historical persons and events, and the city of Rome gained an increasingly religio-historical topography (Hölscher 1978; Hölkeskamp 1987).

In the late Republic, the leading generals, Gaius Marius and Sulla, Pompey and Julius Caesar, instrumentalized this practice in an increasingly aggressive war of monuments: they demanded monuments from the senate and erected their own, which supported their claims to unique positions of state leadership; they destroyed the monuments of their rivals and restored destroyed monuments of their own political faction (Hölscher 1980b and 2004).

Augustus ended these provocative actions and ushered in a consensus. The senate offered the emperor a number of high honors, he declined some of them, and an agreement was reached on forms that appeared acceptable to all (von den Hoff 2009). In the imperial era, explicit honors, especially honorific monuments, were not ordinarily initiated by the emperor himself but by other institutions, primarily by the senate and the people. Thus, for example, Augustus and Trajan erected large forum complexes, but the central monuments to the emperors, a quadriga in the Forum of Augustus, and an equestrian statue and an honorary column in Trajan's Forum, were dedicated by the senate and the people. These monuments primarily served to ensure the glorious memory of the imperial donor of the forum and his achievements, and it is in this spirit

that Trajan's Column supported a portrait statue of the emperor, and an extraordinarily detailed pictorial report of his military campaigns against the Dacians decorates its shaft. All imperial Roman "state reliefs," the best-known pictorial monuments of Roman history, are celebratory decorations of large public buildings and monuments, erected by other entities in honor of the emperor. Thus, with Augustus a new period of historical commemoration was inaugurated (Simon 1986; Zanker 1987/1988; Pollini 2012).

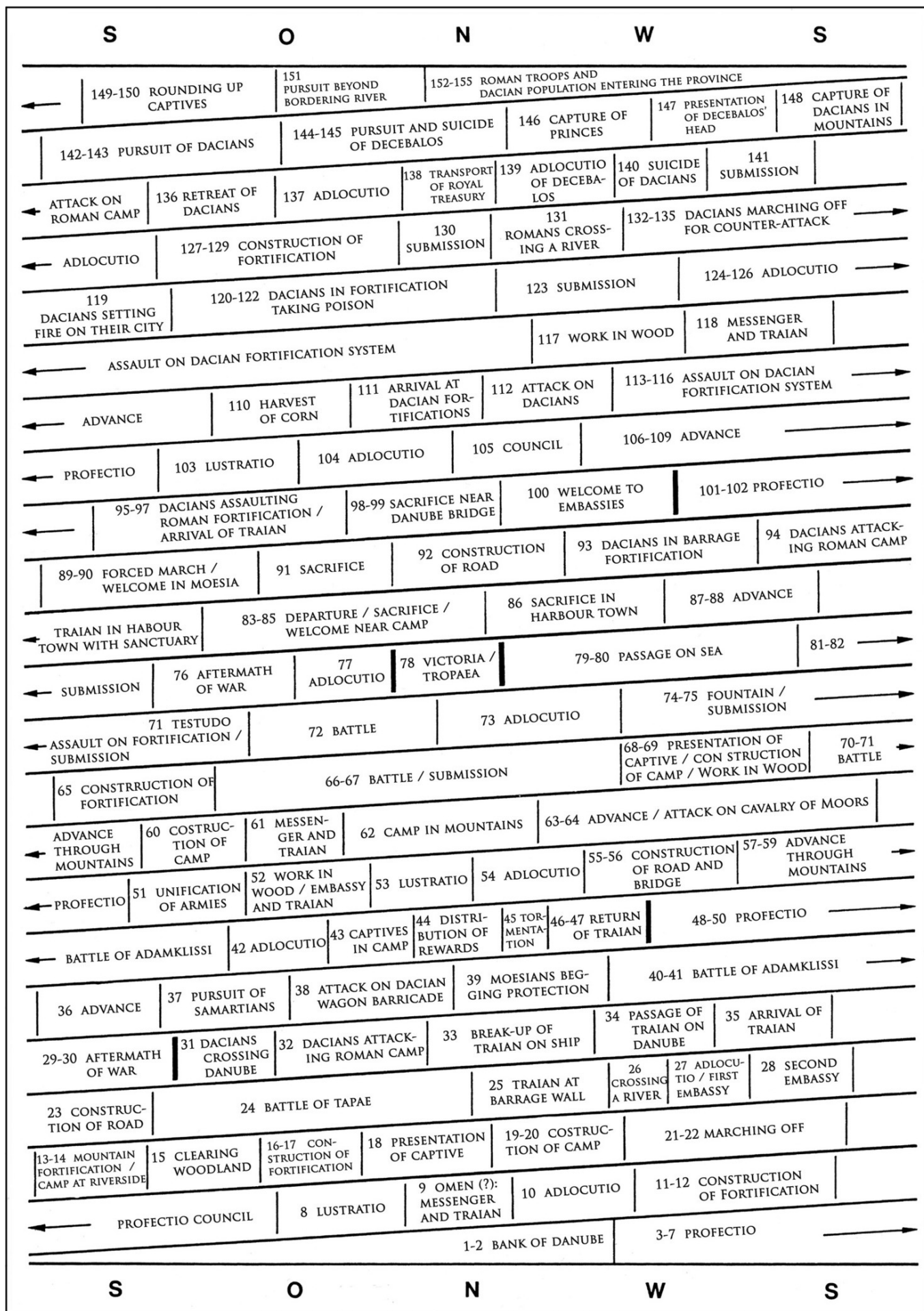
The history presented by public monuments is fundamentally shaped by the present circumstances. Individuals and events of the present are usually glorified and inscribed into collective memory as "history" to be preserved for the future. From the past, it is primarily heroes such as Aeneas and Romulus, and events from the beginnings of Rome, that were celebrated as the founding myths of the state. The interim period between Rome's foundation and the present was primarily commemorated in monumental galleries of "great men" and ancestors who lead from the remote past to the leading men of the present; the most famous example is the Forum of Augustus (Zanker 1987/1988; Spannagel 1999).

Public monuments have great political impetus. They occupy public spaces with the memory of and claims to power. Monuments embody the presence of this power and demand its recognition. The destruction of a monument means the obliteration of this power. Monuments are weapons.

Historical Reality versus Political Ideology

The political memory of public monuments is simultaneously historical and ideological. Scholars have often seen history and ideology as diametrical antitheses, and the monuments have been interpreted in one sense or the other. In reality, however, these two aspects cannot be separated: on the one hand, the "reality" of history is never merely a documentation of facts, but always selected, configured, and interpreted by people; on the other hand, ideology obtains its persuasive power only through historical realization. Roman "historical" monuments show this dialectic between historical reality and ideological concepts in many facets (Hölscher 1980a and 2003).

Trajan's Column is antiquity's most detailed example of a pictorial chronicle of events ([Figures 2.1–2.2](#); cf. Settis 1988; Coarelli 1999; Hölscher 2002). The spiral relief strip that envelops its shaft portrays in exceptional detail both of Trajan's Dacian Wars (101–102 and 105–106 CE) in more than 100 scenes. They depict the crossing of the Danube, the construction of fortresses and roads, advances and battles, Dacian counter-attacks, the destruction of villages, voluntary and forced subjugation of the enemy, discovery and removal of royal Dacian treasures, pursuit and death of the enemy King Decebalus, and punishment and resettlement of the enemy population. The scenes flow into one another without separation; the emperor repeatedly reappears as the protagonist of the events. The narrative principle is the chronological and spatial sequence from the initial attack to the Romans' final victory. (These principles of narrative depiction are resumed, in a selection of four panels, in the arch of Septimius Severus in Rome; Brilliant 1967).



[Figure 2.2](#) Rome, Column of Trajan, distribution of subjects.

Chart: Tonio Hölscher.

However, none of this amounts to a purely factual chronicle of events. The entire war is intentionally organized on the basis of conceptual models. The three offensive campaigns depicted on the column unfold in the following sequence of events: the army crosses the Danube (*profectio*), a war council is held (*consilium*), the army is ritually purified (*lustratio*), the emperor gives an encouraging address to his soldiers (*adlocutio*), strongholds are built, the army advances into enemy territory, the battle takes place, the enemies are subjugated (*submissio*), a laudatory speech is given by the emperor, and the consequences for the local population are shown. Two defensive campaigns are conceived in a similar scheme: attack of the Dacians on Roman territory, the emperor hurries to the defense, battle, siege and conquest, and consequences of war. The sequence of the scenes varies, but the basic structures remain clear, revealing a standardized concept of an “ideal” Roman war.

The individual scenes convey ideological messages with various degrees of clarity. This is particularly obvious in that many of the pictorial themes represented have little military significance for a war report. All offensive campaigns begin with a *profectio*, which testifies to the Romans’ readiness for battle (*virtus*). This is followed by the war council as an example of good planning (*consilium*), the sacrifice as indication of fulfillment of religious obligation (*pietas*) and foresight (*providentia*), and the *adlocutio* as evidence of the trust (*fides*) and unity (*concordia*) shared by emperor and army. The ensuing construction of fortresses and roads shows the virtue of work (*labor*); the advance and the (unwaveringly victorious) battle are proof of courage (*virtus*) and victory (*victoria*). The emperor demonstrates leniency (*clementia*) or justice (*iustitia*) in the subsequent subjugation, and severity (*severitas*) in punishment. Altogether, the detailed pictorial report is an almost systematic presentation of both ideological models and the virtues of Roman policy.

The ideological character is even clearer in other monuments. A series of large relief panels, probably from a triumphal arch for the emperor Marcus Aurelius (176 CE), portrays individual scenes from the wars against the Germans ([Figure 2.3](#); cf. Ryberg 1967). Here, actual acts of war are largely moved to the background in lieu of ideologically significant ritual scenes. In addition to *profectio*, *lustratio*, *adlocutio*, and *submissio*, which we recognize from Trajan’s Column, we find the appointment of a client king (*providentia*), glorious return to Rome (*adventus*), triumph (*virtus*), concluding sacrifice on the Capitoline Hill (*pietas*), and distribution of money to the population (*liberalitas*). No battle scene is preserved, and there may never have been one. It is particularly instructive that each scene only occurs once: the reliefs must therefore have been organized according to a standardized sequence of war scenes.





Figure 2.3 Panel relief from an honorary arch of Marcus Aurelius. Rome, Arch of Constantine.

Photo: Alinari Archives, Florence. Foto Anderson 2539.

It is clear from imperial coinage, where corresponding images are commented on by written legends, that these scenes can be read as models of political and ethical behavior. However, they must not be “read” as mere codes signifying verbal political slogans. The images have their own power of visual realization that interacts with the abstract concepts of language in a complex process of mutual influence (see the later discussion).

In the monuments of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, historical reality and ideology were related to each other in very different ways, and emphasized in very different proportions. However, they always refer to each other dialectically: history is the realization of ideological concepts. The key term that links them together is *exemplum* (Settis 1985). The prominent individuals, achievements, and events of history are models of political and social ideals that are meant to take effect in the present and the future.

History and Ritual

This interpretation entails that, in monuments, “historical” memory is primarily created in scenes of more or less ritualized character. The pictorial decoration of the large Altar of

Augustan Peace (*Ara Pacis Augustae*), which was built in 13–9 BCE on the occasion of the emperor's return from the wars in Gaul and Spain, does not recall his successes and achievements in the provinces, but his celebratory return to Rome (Simon 1967; Billows 1993): two large friezes appear to portray the procession on the occasion of the foundation of the *Ara Pacis*, with the emperor, the highest priestly colleges, and the imperial family participating ([Figure 2.4](#), [10.4–10.5](#)). It is highly instructive that all important persons are included, even those who cannot really have participated: the religious community of Rome had to be displayed by its highest representatives. Alongside this one-time appearance of the historical protagonists, the annual sacrificial procession during the festival of the *Ara Pacis* is depicted in anonymous form on a small frieze around the altar proper. Both friezes preserve the memory of rituals that perpetuate the virtue of *pietas* as the foundation of Augustus' peaceful rule—one in a general, the other in a specific way.

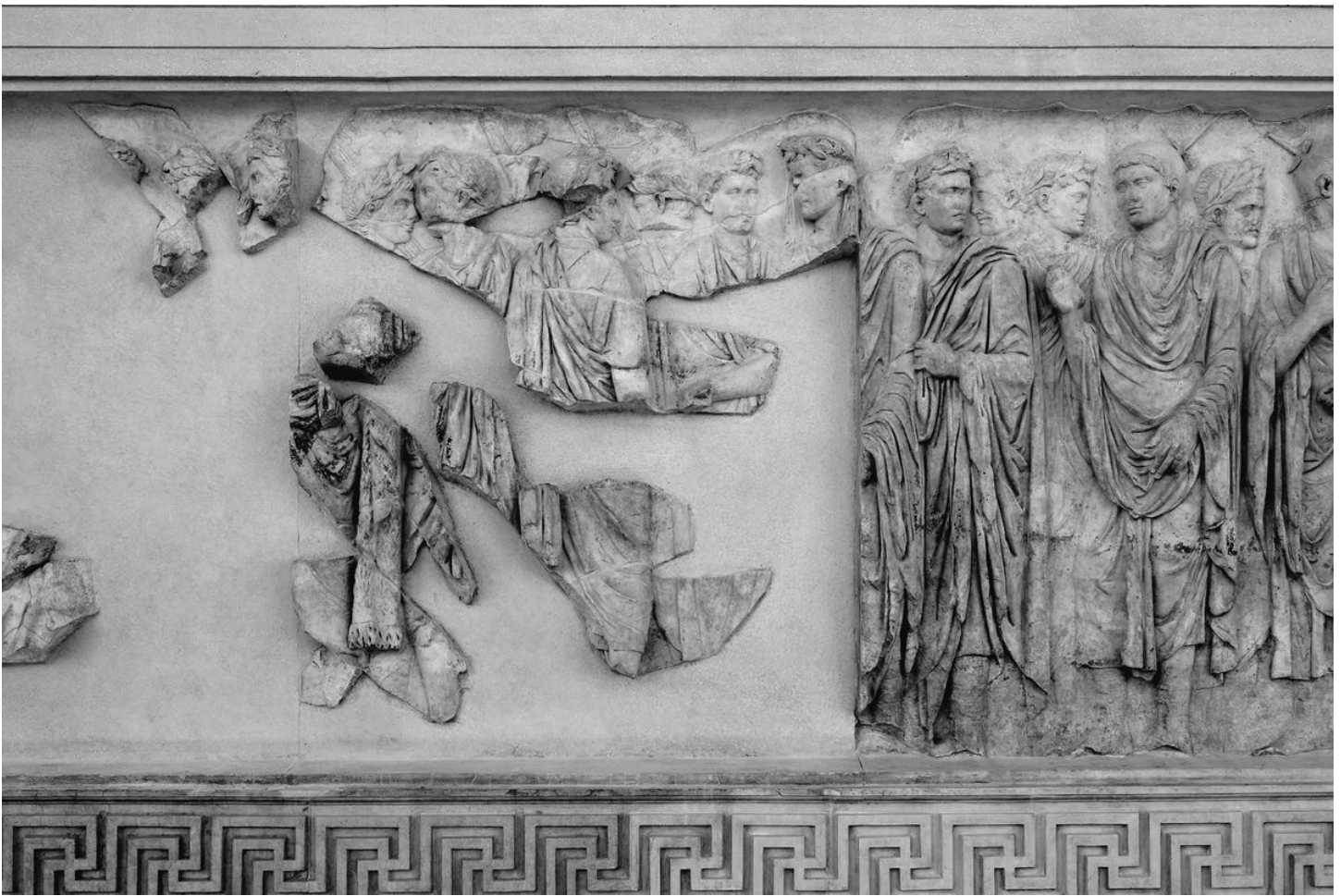


Figure 2.4 Rome, *Ara Pacis Augustae*, part of south frieze.

Photo: Roma, Museo dell' *Ara Pacis Augustae*.

During the late Republic and early imperial period, traditional religious scenes, sacrifices, and triumphal processions predominate in public representational art as demonstrations of *pietas* and *virtus* (Ryberg 1955). Over the course of the imperial period, the increasing glorification of the emperor resulted in additional ceremonies with a strong panegyric character. Embarking on a military campaign (*profectio*) and especially returning after military victories, and, later,

the emperor's entry into the capital at the start of his reign (*adventus*), were celebrated with a parade that included the senate, the priesthoods, and the Roman people; starting with the Flavian Dynasty, these scenes featured in state art such as the Cancelleria Reliefs ([Figure 10.10](#); Magi 1945), the Arch of Trajan in Benevento ([Figure 2.6](#); Rotili 1972), and Trajan's Column (see earlier; Koeppel 1969). The apotheosis of the rulers is glorified allegorically on posthumous monuments, such as the Arch of Titus in Rome (Pfanner 1983) or the Column of Antoninus Pius (Vogel 1973).

The mid-imperial period also witnessed the documentation of those provisions and actions of the emperor that testify to his affinity with the lower social classes. Alongside addresses (*adlocutio*) to the soldiers, which demonstrate his good relations (*fides*, *concordia*) with the army, there are, above all, distributions of money (*congiarium*) to needy segments of the population, families with many children, and so on. On two Trajanic relief friezes from the Forum Romanum, known as the *Anaglypha Traiani*, such a scene is linked to a depiction of public debt cancelation through the burning of tablets recording tax debts (Rüdiger 1973).

This development attests to a general change in the emperor's role: from protagonist of the traditional virtues of the ruling class to an all-encompassing father figure of the entire populace. However, these changes did not cause the old themes of victory and religion to be abandoned, but rather expanded on them. As a whole, the concept of rulership remained unchanged in many respects.

Accordingly, the monuments present all these models in a strongly ritualized format. Even the war chronicle of Trajan's Column is, to a large degree, interspersed with ritual scenes. The emperor and his entourage play a public role in which he represents, through various rituals and ceremonies, a largely traditional ideological concept of rulership. This concept is reinforced by the monuments.

The Pictorial Language: Realism versus Allegory and Symbol

The scenes of political representation are depicted in a distinctive combination of realism, symbolism, and allegory. All forms of representation serve the politico-ideological message.

In the images, the reality of the political scenes, with their numerous participants, is always concentrated on a few significant figures. Typically, a protagonist, usually the emperor, features in the center; the action scenes are arranged around him almost as attributes of his role. Depending on the context, the emperor is surrounded by cult personnel or military advisers who demonstrate his qualities as Rome's highest representative in cult and war. The other participants are usually represented by only one or few figures: senators, priests, knights, and other social groups, soldiers of various military ranks, and also "barbaric" enemies.

Under Augustus, and increasingly in the Flavian era, figures of deities and personifications appear among the real participants. They do not indicate religious veneration of the emperor or other protagonists, but glorify them in a panegyric that uses allegorical pictorial language. As

the highest god of the state, Jupiter installs Trajan as ruler of the world (Rotili 1972); Minerva escorts Domitian into Rome as his personal protective goddess ([Figure 10.10](#); Magi 1945). Other ideal figures straddle the borderline between divinity and allegory. During his triumphal procession, the emperor Titus is accompanied by Virtus and Honos, and crowned by Victoria. All of these figures were venerated in temples in Rome, but in images they primarily serve as visual expressions of the military courage, honor, and victory of the triumphant emperor (Pfanner 1983). In addition, ideal figures can embody specific groups of real participants. On his departure for war, the emperor Marcus Aurelius is accompanied through the city gate by the Genius of the senate and (probably) the Genius of the people, just as the senate and the people actually gave him a celebratory farewell in the *profectio*. On his victorious entrance into Rome, the war god Mars follows him as representative of the army, while the goddess Roma precedes him as representative of the capital's population, in full correspondence with the actual ritual of the *adventus* (Ryberg 1955 and 1967).

The depiction of topographical spaces is, to a large degree, selective. The political rituals can be shown against a background of state architecture if it is meaningful to the event (Sobocinski 2009). The Porta Triumphalis appears in the victorious *adventus* and the emperor's triumph, and indicates the ritual separation between the "outside" of military activity and the "inside" of the city's community. Similarly, we find the nearby temple of the goddess Fortuna Redux, to whom Rome owed the safe return of the emperor and the army. The sacrifice celebrating their victory is shown in front of the façade of the Capitoline temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, who thus is symbolically present at the event. In images, architecture always bears religio-political meaning.

The representative selection of figures unites with a synthetic depiction of actions. Victorious battles are portrayed in a typology of heroic and impassioned fighting; the triumph is concentrated on the group around the triumphator in his quadriga and the presentation of spoils; sacrifices are reduced to the dignified representation of the protagonist pouring a libation, and the dramatic killing of the sacrificial bull. These scenes frequently use fixed representational typologies that correspond to the repetitive character of the rituals. Deities and allegories do not contradict the basic realism of the scenes; they express the ideological aspects that shaped reality.

Great value is placed on the realistic depiction of such details that are significant for the political and ideological message. This applies, on the one hand, to the symbols of political and social rank of the individuals portrayed: the toga indicated the Roman citizen; senators, knights, and plebeians were differentiated through the color of their garments and different footwear. Magistrates were distinguished by lictors; the presence or absence of axes in their *fascies* marked their office as either military or civic. On the other hand, it was crucial that the religious rituals were depicted realistically and in their prescribed forms. The person offering the sacrifice had a fold of the toga drawn over his head (*capite velato*) in Roman ritual, but was bare-headed in Greek cults. The priests and cult servants appear in specific garb, they are equipped with special implements and vessels for the cult, play music with the prescribed instruments, and perform the rituals in traditional ways. In addition, gestures that communicate political significance are precisely depicted: a raised arm, for instance, for a public speech

(*adlocutio*), an outstretched arm for the granting of mercy on the subjugation of enemies, or the handshake between two political partners (*dextrarum iunctio*) for confirmation of a contract or mutual trust (Brilliant 1963).

Apart from the large state reliefs, these trends are particularly prominent in the smaller reliefs that primarily decorated the monuments and tombs of the Roman middle classes and the Italian municipal elites. They visualize social status and achievements in simple, paratactic compositions ranging from the religious rituals of lesser officials to the bakery of the freedman Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces. Scholars have interpreted such images either in “national” terms as evidence of “*romanitas*,” or in social terms as “plebeian art” (Bianchi Bandinelli 1967a and b). In fact, however, we are dealing with the “presentational style” mentioned above, which served in various contexts to visualize themes that required a certain degree of factual detail (Petersen 2006; Hölscher 2012).

Yet, the realism of the details only ever extends as far as it serves the political message; irrelevant aspects of reality are never depicted for their own sake, but are instead largely ignored. We are therefore dealing with a selective realism that serves to communicate significant semantic content.

Rome and the Empire

The emergence of the Roman Empire out of a city state had the consequence that the monuments of political identity and collective memory, most of which were erected by the power elite—that is, the senate and the emperor—were mainly concentrated in Rome itself. Over time, however, the practice of erecting monuments was extended in two directions: horizontally from the capital into the expanse of the empire, and vertically from the political elite into other social classes.

In many cases, the monuments in the empire were shaped by local expectations, and thus differ from the traditions of the capital. In the expansive phase of the Republic, Roman generals already marked their conquests with spectacular monuments in the provinces. One early example is the pillar monument of Lucius Aemilius Paullus Macedonicus at Delphi (168 BCE), which carried an equestrian statue of the victor, and was converted from a monument to his defeated opponent, the Macedonian King Perseus. A Greek-style frieze all around its upper part portrays the victorious battle as the basis of his fame (Kähler 1965).

In the imperial period, emperors were not only worshipped in public sanctuaries, but also honored by monuments of various kinds. Among the largest and most lavishly decorated examples is the Sebasteion of Aphrodisias (Asia Minor), which consisted of a three-storied passageway that led to the temple of the deified and ruling Roman emperors and Aphrodite/Venus, the ancestral goddess of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. Its porticoes were decorated with 180 relief panels depicting Roman rule from an eastern perspective ([Figures 24.2](#) and [28.5](#)). The emperors appear in traditional Hellenistic allegorical scenes, and personifications represent the provinces of the Roman Empire, all surrounded by the gods of the Greco-Roman world. Another gigantic work of this kind is a monumental relief frieze from

Ephesus, whose architectural context remains unclear ([Figure 2.5](#); cf. Oberleitner 2006). It celebrates the rule of the emperor Antoninus Pius (138–161 CE) with pictorial themes that concern the whole Empire, but seen from the perspective of the capital of the province of Asia: the dynasty of the present-day emperors with a sacrifice according to Greek ritual; a battle against a range of different, but primarily eastern barbarians, in which the emperor appears as a Greek god in a quadriga; personifications of cities of the Empire, including Ephesus, which appear on par with the Roman capital.



Figure 2.5 Relief frieze with battle scene from a monument of Antoninus Pius. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, inv. I 865.

Photo: Kunsthistorisches Museum, Wien.

The equal value of province and capital is even more strongly accentuated in the Arch of Septimius Severus in Leptis Magna (203 CE), the emperor's native town. In monumental relief

friezes, it depicts the triumphant entries of the emperor into Leptis Magna and Rome as well as the emperor's celebratory sacrifices to the gods of both cities (Strocka 1972). Barely a century later, the full decentralization of the Empire is demonstrated by the arch in front of Galerius' imperial palace in Thessaloniki (Mayer 2002).

Systems of Ideology

On richly decorated monuments, images from "history" are configured into a complex ideological arrangement.

The actual body of the Ara Pacis Augustae (13–9 BCE) was decorated with multiple friezes in which Rome's global dominance was linked to state religion ([Figures 10.4–10.5](#); Simon 1967). Personifications of subdued provinces were depicted in the lower tiers, while the traditional annual sacrificial procession at the festival of the Ara Pacis (*anniversarium sacrificium*) was shown in the uppermost frieze, expressing the Roman idea that peace is only possible on the basis of victory (*victoriis parta pax*). The full concept of eternal Augustan peace is presented on the perimeter wall of the sacred precinct. Ornamental plants that symbolize the fecundity of the era of peace and are populated by the swans of Apollo, the emperor's protective god, feature in the bottom tier. Above, the long sides depict the one-time procession to establish the altar, including Augustus as the protagonist of *pietas* ([Figure 2.4](#)), the most prominent priestly colleges, and the imperial family as the current pillars of the state. They are supplemented by the mythical founders of Rome flanking the entrance: Aeneas as an *exemplum* of *pietas*, and the Roman she-wolf with Romulus and Remus as future models of Roman *virtus*. On the rear side, they are juxtaposed with personifications of Rome's global empire: the warlike goddess of the city, Roma, enthroned on a pile of weapons, and the peaceful earth goddess Tellus with her flourishing children in an abundant landscape of domestic animals and vegetation. The altar and its perimeter wall complement each other: on the altar, the traditional, general concepts of imperial rule and religion; on the enclosure, the vision of the era of peace that was brought about by Augustus, had been prefigured by the heroes of mythical prehistory, and gains eternity in the allegories of Rome and Empire.

Similarly, the pictorial decoration of the Arch of Trajan in Benevento (109–114 CE) is systematically formed into a conception of imperial dominance ([Figure 2.6](#); cf. Fittschen 1972; Rotili 1972; Hölscher 2002). Both fronts of the arch are decorated with relief panels in three tiers that differ according to their direction, inward toward Rome or outward toward the Empire. The lower tier depicts the beginnings of Trajan's rule: on the exterior, he is shown securing the borders through treaties with foreign peoples; on the interior, his arrival in Rome and his recognition by the senate and the people are depicted. The second tier visualizes general administrative measures: the conscription of soldiers, care for veterans, and so on. The upper tier shows the emperor's triumphant successes: on the exterior, the pacification of the conquered province of Dacia, and the integration of various deities into the Roman Empire; on the interior, his recognition by Jupiter, the foremost god of the state, who presents his thunderbolt to Trajan and thereby installs him as ruler of the Earth. This general concept of government is supplemented by two reliefs in the passageway of the arch that praise the

emperor's achievements in the area of Beneventum: the inauguration of the road to Brundisium, which was paid for by the emperor, and financial support for families with many children in the Italian cities. Through its image decoration, the architecture of the arch is turned into a cosmos of imperial rule.



Figure 2.6 Benevento, honorary arch of Trajan.

Photo: Alinari Archives, Florence. Foto Alinari 11495.

This cosmos possessed a surprising diachronic stability. The arch of Constantine (312–315

CE) was only partially decorated with newly carved reliefs that depict Constantine's rise to power. The majority of the decoration consists of reused reliefs from monuments to Trajan, Hadrian, and Marcus Aurelius, in which only the heads of the emperors were replaced with portraits of Constantine (in part, also of his co-emperor Licinius; cf. [Figure 2.3](#)). It is disputed whether the selection of these reliefs demonstrates that Constantine considered these specific emperors his role models. In any case, the reuse clearly shows that the pictorial themes employed by previous rulers (*adventus* and *profectio*, sacrifices, *adlocutio*, triumph, and so on) were so topical that they could be adopted for the current emperor simply by exchanging the heads. These heterogeneous series form a comprehensive concept of imperial rule, which is framed by Constantinian medallions of Sol and Luna on the sides of the arch, and thereby obtains a late antique cosmic character (L'Orange and von Gerkan 1939).

Visibility and Cultural Practice

The complex "historical" decoration of the large state monuments strongly contrasts with the conditions of its visibility. Trajan's Column stood in a narrow courtyard surrounded by porticos, so that its relief band, the end of which was 35 meters above ground level, could only be seen from an extremely steep angle. The many details of the scenes and, above all, the ideological aspects of the narrative structure cannot have been discernible. However, monuments like the Ara Pacis, whose reliefs were easily visible at eye level, will also hardly have been perceived as a complex "program," because that would have required the viewer to walk repeatedly around the exterior wall and the interior altar in order to understand the iconographic references. In general, state monuments stood in spaces of public life where people did not usually spend their time thoroughly studying pictorial programs.

Discussions of this issue have been controversial. Occasionally scholars have concluded from the poor visibility that sophisticated analyses of the monuments' imagery are misguided (Veyne 1988). Others have posited that the ancient viewers were, in fact, able to gain a good view, for example from the roofs of the buildings around Trajan's Column. The most appropriate position is probably one that acknowledges the complex meanings as well as the restricted visibility (Settis 1992; Galinier 2007), and assumes various levels of perception. Initially, viewers perceived the entire monument in its material size, shape, and function, and realized the existence of its rich decoration; in doing so, and based on their general experience, they could assume that the themes and motifs were appropriate to the monument and explained its significance. From the context, for instance the Forum of Trajan, or from general knowledge of the urban landscape, for instance the area around the Ara Pacis, they will usually have known to which emperor the monument was dedicated. These basic steps of appreciation will surely have been taken, more or less consciously, even by those who stopped there for reasons other than studying the monuments. Anyone who wanted to see more could glance at the lower turns of the column, or the individual reliefs of the Ara Pacis, and would have recognized the general theme of war against the Dacians, or the religious procession; depending on the level of interest, he or she could also penetrate further into the details, for which a general familiarity with the political iconography, state monuments, or coins could have been helpful;

the original coloring of the reliefs would also have made some details stand out more clearly. He or she could associate the ideological concepts of *virtus* and *pietas*, and could even comprehend the meaning behind the constellation of individual pictorial themes on a given monument. These are all *potential* steps of perception that are not absolutely necessary for a basic understanding—and could be supplemented with imagination wherever a closer view was not possible. For this potential meaning to be unfolded, however, it is imperative that the observer be convinced that the decoration does in fact have a complex meaning even on the level of its minor details. This conviction allows the viewer to participate in the meaning of the monument even if he or she only captures it in a very general and partial way. The meaning of the monument thus obtains a certain autonomy that is nonetheless essential for its effect.

Image, Reality, and Meaning

Images are not merely reflections of reality, but constructs of visual meaning. Political monuments visualize ideological concepts. However, they are much more than translations of key political terms such as *virtus* and *pietas* into an image. Unlike language, images lend a visual presence and visibility to the messages. Beyond the decoding of the iconography, understanding images therefore requires a visual empathy with the meanings of the images' physical realities, postures, and actions.

The imagery of “historical” monuments depicts real scenes of political life in their ideologically charged historical significance. This does not imply, as constructivists often assume, an opposition between a given and meaningless reality on the one hand, and a construction of meaning in the medium of the image on the other. The real scenes of political life also have a specific format in which meaning is conveyed and perceived: rituals and ceremonies, gatherings of communities, and actions by individuals on the “political stage” are inconceivable without meanings. Visual strategies are adopted in real life as well as in art. Reality, too, is an “image.” The world of images, on the one hand, and the world of real people and objects, on the other, are two “media” through which visual meaning is conveyed.

The visual strategies of images and the world of real life are, however, subject to different conditions. There are analogies, in some respects: the semantics of bodies and postures, gestures, clothing, and equipment; the central position of protagonists and their facing, frontal or otherwise; the hierarchy of front and back, above and below, and so on. Yet art can do more than that: by selecting, configuring, and stylizing, it creates semantic emphases and nuances that are not possible in the real world. This is where the real significance of political monuments lies for our understanding of the Roman world.

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

The majority of scholarship in this field has been published in German and Italian. Important contributions in English are the pioneering work of Scott Ryberg (1955), and Torelli (1982). For recent work on single monuments see, for instance, Smith (1987 and 2013) and Kuttner (1995). Among general historical interpretations of public and private art under individual

emperors, see the classical monograph of Zanker (1987/1988) and, more recently, Pollini (2012). For the language of images in public art, see Hölscher (2004).

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CHAPTER 3

Methodological Approaches to the Dating and Identification of Roman Portraits

Klaus Fittschen

Researching Roman Portraits as a Scholarly Task

To date, approximately 25–30,000 portraits from the Roman Empire have been discovered, which were created during the 350-year period from the late Republic to the end of the third century CE. Approximately 4–5,000 of these are images of Roman emperors and their family members. This is, of course, only a fraction of those that previously existed. The original number must have been significantly higher, mainly because all residents of the Empire placed great value on immortalizing themselves through portraiture (cf. Fejfer, [Chapter 12](#), this volume). This applies not only to the emperor and free citizens, but also to the unfree (if only in limited measure). Portraiture is thus a constitutive characteristic of Roman culture, and constitutes a legitimate and necessary subject for historical research. Initially, starting in the early Renaissance, it was collectors, enthusiasts, and dilettantes who were primarily concerned with Roman portraits. Since the end of the nineteenth century, the topic has been taken up by academic scholarship, and the study of portraits has developed into a subdiscipline of archaeological research. As part of that process, specific methods were developed and continuously refined, which are described in this chapter.

The First Step: Distinguishing Portraits of Emperors from Private Portraits

The initial task is to examine and sort the monuments that have been preserved, and to develop appropriate criteria for this process. Separating the images of Roman emperors (and their family members) from the great mass of other portraits has proven useful because only the former provide a reliable chronological framework. All portraits that are not of members of the imperial family are called private portraits. This term is convenient, but potentially misleading, since due to the conditions of preservation (disturbed discovery contexts, insufficient documentation during several hundreds of years of excavation), it is only rarely possible to determine whether a portrait had been created for a public or a private context, and whether the private contexts might not have been semi-public as well (e.g., in villas).

Given that only very few portraits have been found with their previously existing inscriptions, it is initially uncertain whether a nameless portrait depicts an emperor (or one of his family members) or a private person. Since private portraits will usually remain permanently nameless to us, the portraits of emperors must be identified first.

The Most Useful Aid in Identifying Portraits of Roman Emperors: Portraits on Coins

All Roman emperors and many of their family members are depicted on coins. These provide the easiest way of recognizing portraits of emperors in the round. Some correct identifications had already been achieved in this way during the Renaissance. Since research on Roman portraits has been undertaken with scientific standards—that is, since the end of the nineteenth century—almost all Roman emperors have been positively identified in their sculptural image, despite numerous false attributions that persist up to the present. Ambiguities only remain with respect to some short-lived emperors of the late second and third centuries, as well as emperors' family members for whom depictions on coins do not exist.

It has been shown that only the portraits on coins that were minted by the Empire have authoritative value as source material; portraits on coins that were minted by provinces or cities deviate, sometimes considerably, from those minted by the Empire, because reliable models for engraving were not readily available or simply not available at all.

Different Portraits of One Emperor: The Discovery of Portrait Types

The coin portraits also allow another important insight. It is easy to observe that an emperor's coin portraits do not always look the same; differences can be seen in, for example, changing hairstyles. Such changes in hairstyle are particularly obvious in the coin portraits of empresses. Empress Julia Domna (Augusta from 193–217 CE), for instance, is depicted on coins in profile with two very different hairstyles: with a large bun (chignon) at the back of her head ([Figure 3.1](#)) and with long, helmet-like hair hanging down on her neck and a small “nest” at the back ([Figure 3.3](#)). Both of these coin portrait types can be connected with sculptural portraits of which multiple copies have been preserved; these copies are replicas of one another; that is they must be derived from the same model ([Figures 3.2, 3.4](#)). As the sculpted portraits match the coin portraits, it follows that the coin portraits are derived from the same model as the sculptural replicas. This shared model is called the portrait type. No original example of such a portrait type has been preserved; it must be imagined as a model portrait made in clay, plaster, or wax that remained in the workshop of the artist who created the design, or with the contractor; that is, in the imperial administration.



Figure 3.1 Portrait of Julia Domna, Gabii type; Aureus dated to 193–198 CE. After: J. Kent, B. Overbeck, A. Stylow, *Die römische Münze* (Munich 1973), pl. XVII 385.

Courtesy of Hirmer Fotoarchiv Munich.

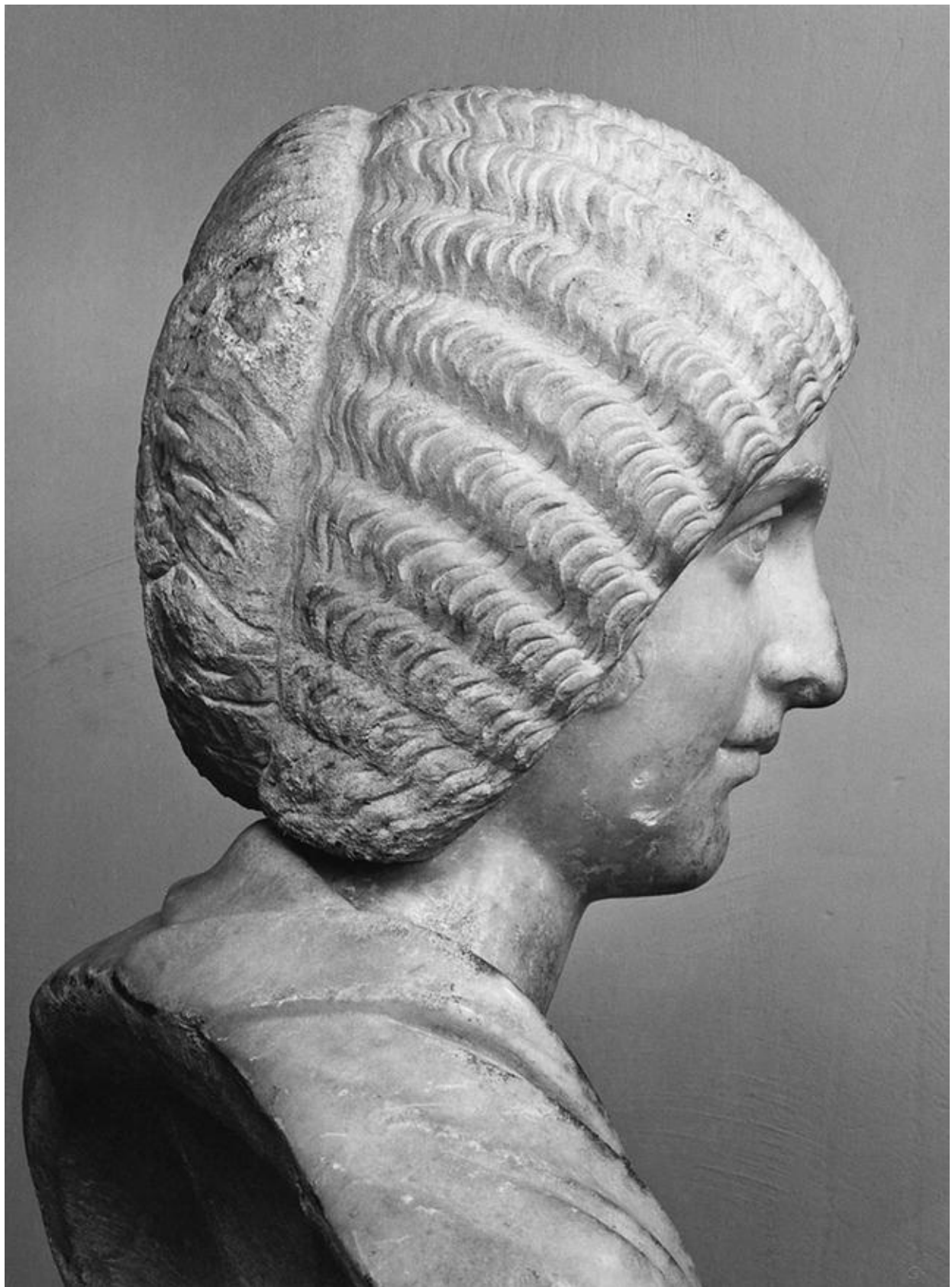


Figure 3.2 [Marble portrait of Julia Domna, Gabii type; Stuttgart, Württembergisches Landesmuseum, inv. Arch 67/19.](#)

Photo: G. Fittschen-Badura.



Figure 3.3 Portrait of Julia Domna, Leptis type; Aureus dated to 211–217 CE. After: L. von Matt, H. Kühner, *Die Caesaren* (Zurich, 1984), pl. 97a.

Courtesy of Gemeinnützige Stiftung Leonard von Matt.



Figure 3.4 Marble portrait of Julia Domna, Leptis type; New Haven, Yale University Art Museum.

Photo: Yale University, Art Gallery.

The insight, gleaned entirely from the monuments, that such portrait types must have existed

represents the decisive breakthrough in research on imperial-era portraiture. This discovery was made by J.J. Bernoulli by investigating the portraits of Julia Domna (Bernoulli 1894, 35–47) just mentioned. When he introduced the term “portrait type,” it was not yet known that this term was already used in antiquity. This follows from the inscriptions on two portrait herms of a certain Herennianos, which were only recently discovered in Dion (Northern Greece). The text says: “two portraits, but only one *typos*.” We now know that multiple such portrait types existed for almost all Roman emperors and many of their family members. Research has since been faced with the task of determining what these different portrait types were intended for and how their respective creation can be dated.

Emperor Portraits Are Not Unique Creations, But Copies of Official Portrait Types

The parallelism between coin portraits and sculptured portraits leads to an additional important insight. The portrait types shown on the coins presented the population of the Empire with the current official portrait of the emperor or the empress. It seems to have been considered important that the same portrait type was used for the sculptural portraits in order to ensure a unified appearance of the emperor or his family members throughout the Empire. Sculptural portraits of emperors are therefore not unique creations (such as the portraits of Hellenistic rulers), but are derived from serial production based on official models: the portrait types. This system is first attested under Augustus and apparently was introduced by Augustus himself (or his advisers). Exact copying of specific models had already been developed in the field of so-called ideal sculpture in Greece in the second century BCE and had been broadly proliferated since then. Portraits of famous Greeks had also been duplicated since that time. Under Augustus, this practice was transferred to the emperor’s portrait and was continued until the end of the third century CE as it had proven to be extremely efficient.

The Creation and Use of Portrait Types

Two questions arise from these observations: How were the portrait types created? And how were they used in the copying workshops? Since there are no written sources from antiquity to answer either question, only the monuments themselves can provide information; parallels from autocracies of more recent history (Napoleon, Atatürk, Stalin) can also provide inspiration. Scholars have not yet reached a consensus about these questions, however. Some lean toward the idea that the production of portrait types and their propagation in copies largely occurred through privately organized workshops, and that the simultaneous existence of several portrait types of an emperor can be attributed to competition between these workshops. In most cases, however, this is certainly incorrect. Without a central administrative authority under the emperor himself, the system of portrait types could not have been implemented and maintained, if only because the imperial mints obviously used the same models. Other observations, which will be discussed in what follows, make the participation of a coordinating authority irrefutable. We do not know whether a specific court sculptor was

commissioned to produce a portrait type or if there was a competition. That the portrait type was presented to the emperor himself for approval can hardly be doubted in light of the importance of the portraits for the emperor's self-representation. Only with his approval was the portrait type made accessible to the reproducing workshops. We also do not know whether they were imperial or private workshops. The stylistic homogeneity of many portrait copies from the city of Rome, particularly in the second century CE, seems to suggest that copying workshops worked under imperial direction, at least in Rome. (However, our evidence proves that they also worked for private persons.)

The portrait copies demonstrate that the portrait type ordinarily only consisted of the portrait head and that the form of the final individual manifestation—that is, the connection with a particular type of statue or bust, or with attributes (e.g., wreaths)—was left to the commissioner of a portrait copy. This does not necessarily mean, though, that a particular bust, a characteristic turn of the head (Caracalla), or a particular attribute (e.g., the *corona civica*) could not be part of the original artistic design. Also the material and the formats that could be used by the copyists were not predetermined by the portrait type. From the same model, copies were produced in bronze and marble and ranging from colossal to miniature formats.

The copy workshops in the city of Rome also verifiably “exported” portrait copies (e.g., Spyropoulos 2006, 103–132); workshops outside Rome could also obtain casts of the official portrait types for further multiplication. It is thus not certain from the outset where a portrait copy has been produced; ascertaining the location of the workshop requires detailed scrutiny of the piece. It can be verified that the workshops of the city of Rome worked efficiently and quickly so that orders could be executed rapidly.

Identifying Emperors' Portrait Types That Do Not Appear on Coins

There exist portrait types of some emperors that were not used in imperial coinage. The reason for this is unknown. They have only been recognized as portrait types due to the existence of replicas in the round, and the person depicted can only be identified if the same portrait type has been used in another medium (e.g., in historical reliefs; see later discussion), or if an uncontested physiognomic similarity exists with portrait types whose identity has already been ascertained through coin portraits. However, such a comparison does not always yield unambiguous results.

The opposite case, where a portrait type used for minting coins has no match among the statuary portraits, has not been attested to date; it is also quite an unlikely scenario given that the gaps in our knowledge of sculptural portraits are far more substantial than those in our knowledge of coin portraits.

Distinguishing Emperors' Portrait Types from Private Portraits That Are Also Based on Portrait Types

After it had been understood that portraits of emperors are copies of official portrait types, it was believed, conversely, that every replica series must show an emperor. Caution is in order here, however. Many Romans who were not emperors were honored with multiple portraits, as is known from inscriptions. These portraits were also not usually individual creations, but rather copies of a shared model; that is, a (private) portrait type. The procedure used in the production of an emperor's portrait was transferred to these private portraits, and this apparently already occurred in the Augustan era. Whether a portrait type must be regarded as private or whether it pertains to an emperor must therefore be carefully examined; in some cases a decision cannot be made without additional criteria such as inscriptions or archaeological context.

Other Methods of Identifying Portraits of Emperors: Inscriptions, Archaeological Contexts, and Historical Reliefs

As already indicated, most portraits of emperors and their families as well as of private persons have been left without their pertinent inscription. The number of exceptions with respect to portraits of emperors is so low that it would not have been possible to identify all Roman emperors by inscriptions alone. However, the few extant examples confirm the identifications made with the help of coin portraits. This is important to ascertain, because we know from the ancient literature that “dissimilar” portraits of emperors also existed; that is, portraits that did not match the official portrait types that were familiar to citizens, for instance because they had been converted from older portraits of other individuals. To my knowledge, no example has yet been found of a “dissimilar” portrait of an emperor that has been confirmed by an inscription.

Archaeological contexts can also be helpful for identification; that particularly applies to statue groups showing the imperial family that were popular throughout the imperial era (Rose 1997; Fittschen 1999, 180–183; Boschung 2002). Although they do not immediately lead to identifications, they do permit us to limit the range of persons that must be taken into consideration, and may even allow for reliable identifications by means of excluding those individuals who have already been positively identified by other means (e.g., Boschung 1993b, 58–59).

The portraits of emperors on state reliefs are a special case (Bonanno 1976; on these monuments see Hölscher, [Chapter 2](#), and Holliday, [Chapter 10](#), this volume). The portraits of an emperor were sometimes reworked at a later time—Cancellaria Reliefs ([Figure 10.10](#)), Arcus Novus, Arch of Constantine ([Figure 2.3](#))—but many were maintained in their original form and could therefore likewise be used for identification of statue portraits—Ara Pacis ([Figures 2.4](#) and [10.4–10.5](#)), Trajan's Column ([Figure 2.1](#)), the Arch of Trajan in Benevento ([Figure 2.6](#)), Arco di Portogallo, base of the Column of Antoninus Pius ([Figure 11.1](#)), the Column of Marcus Aurelius, the Aurelian reliefs in the Palazzo dei Conservatori, the Arcus Argentariorum, and the Arch of Septimius Severus in Tripoli. With respect to the portrait types,

they confirm the lesson of the coin comparison. Some of Trajan's portrait types, which are not attested on coins, can be verified by means of the Trajanic reliefs and therefore unambiguously identified. The historical reliefs also provide valuable reference points for dating portrait types, provided that they themselves can be firmly dated or at least chronologically restricted.

Dating Portrait Types of Emperors

The question of the creation date and the chronological sequence of the different portrait types of an emperor is closely connected to that of the reasons and occasions for their creation. Scholarly debate has not yet been concluded for either question, because only the archaeological monuments themselves are available to provide the answers. Apart from the previously mentioned historical reliefs, we mainly rely on coins for evidence, which are frequently exactly dated and thus constitute reliable reference points: the first appearance of a portrait type on a coin provides a *terminus ante quem* (or even *ad quem*) for its creation. The portrait types that were created at the start of an emperor's reign and appear on the earliest coins can be considered as conclusively dated. The portrait types that were created later can only be reliably dated if the corresponding coin portraits are dated. For the long-ruling emperors Trajan and Hadrian, for example, this is not the case, so that the dating of their numerous portrait types has proved difficult. In Trajan's case, a stylistic development, and thus a relative sequence, can be identified based on his hairstyles and their artistic rendering. Since many of his portrait types were used alongside one another on Trajan's Column, all of these must have been created before 113 CE; as the most advanced type only appears on the Benevento arch of 114 CE, it must be the latest. By contrast, the portraits of Hadrian do not seem to show a comparable internal development, and since no other dated sources are available, the dates of his portrait types continue to be particularly uncertain.

Do Portrait Types of Emperors Always Carry a Specific Message?

The question of why several, sometimes even surprisingly large numbers of portrait types were created for many Roman emperors does not have a single answer. For emperors who came to power in their youth (Nero, Marcus Aurelius, Caracalla), it seems reasonable to reflect their aging process in a series of different portrait types. However, no aging process is evident in the portraits of emperors who came into office as grown men. Their portrait types must therefore have been created for other reasons. Scholars assume that the portrait types were created on the occasion of specific political events (consulships, victories, anniversaries, conferment of a title, and so on). Although this can almost never actually be conclusively proven, it is nonetheless plausible in some cases. The plausibility of this explanatory model is demonstrated by the portrait types of Faustina the Younger, which are indeed related to specific events, particularly the births of her children (Fittschen 1982).

Some portrait types of an emperor are so similar to one another that they can only be distinguished with difficulty even today; they are therefore hardly bearers of new, distinct,

programmatic messages. However, there are also portrait types whose political program is so noticeable that it is still recognizable today—the Augustus of Prima Porta type ([Figures 3.7–3.8, 10.7](#)), Nero’s late portrait types, the adoption type of Septimius Severus (compare [Figure 3.6](#) with [Figure 3.5](#)), Caracalla’s portrait as a boy. Prior portrait types of an emperor did not become invalid when a new portrait type was created, but continued to be propagated through new copies. For the buyers, therefore, the choice of existing portrait types continually increased over the course of an emperor’s reign.





Figure 3.5 Marble portrait of Marcus Aurelius, combining features of the third and fourth portrait types of the emperor; Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, inv. 125960.

Photo: G. Fittschen-Badura.

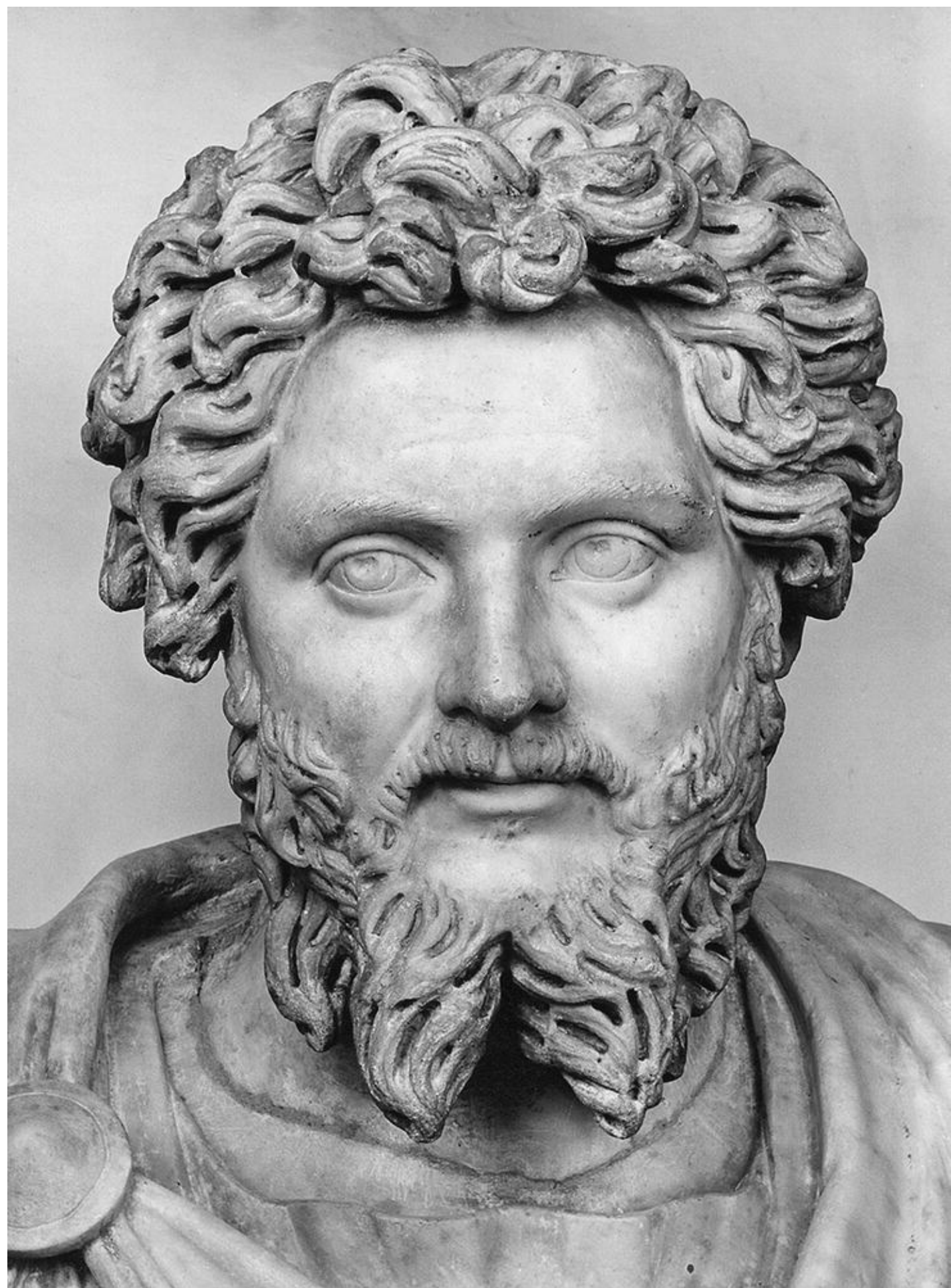


Figure 3.6 Marble portrait of Septimius Severus, Adoption type; Paris, Louvre MA 1113.

Photo: G. Fittschen-Badura.



Figure 3.7 Marble portrait of Augustus, Prima Porta type, Augustan copy; Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, inv. I 60.

Photo: G. Fittschen-Badura.

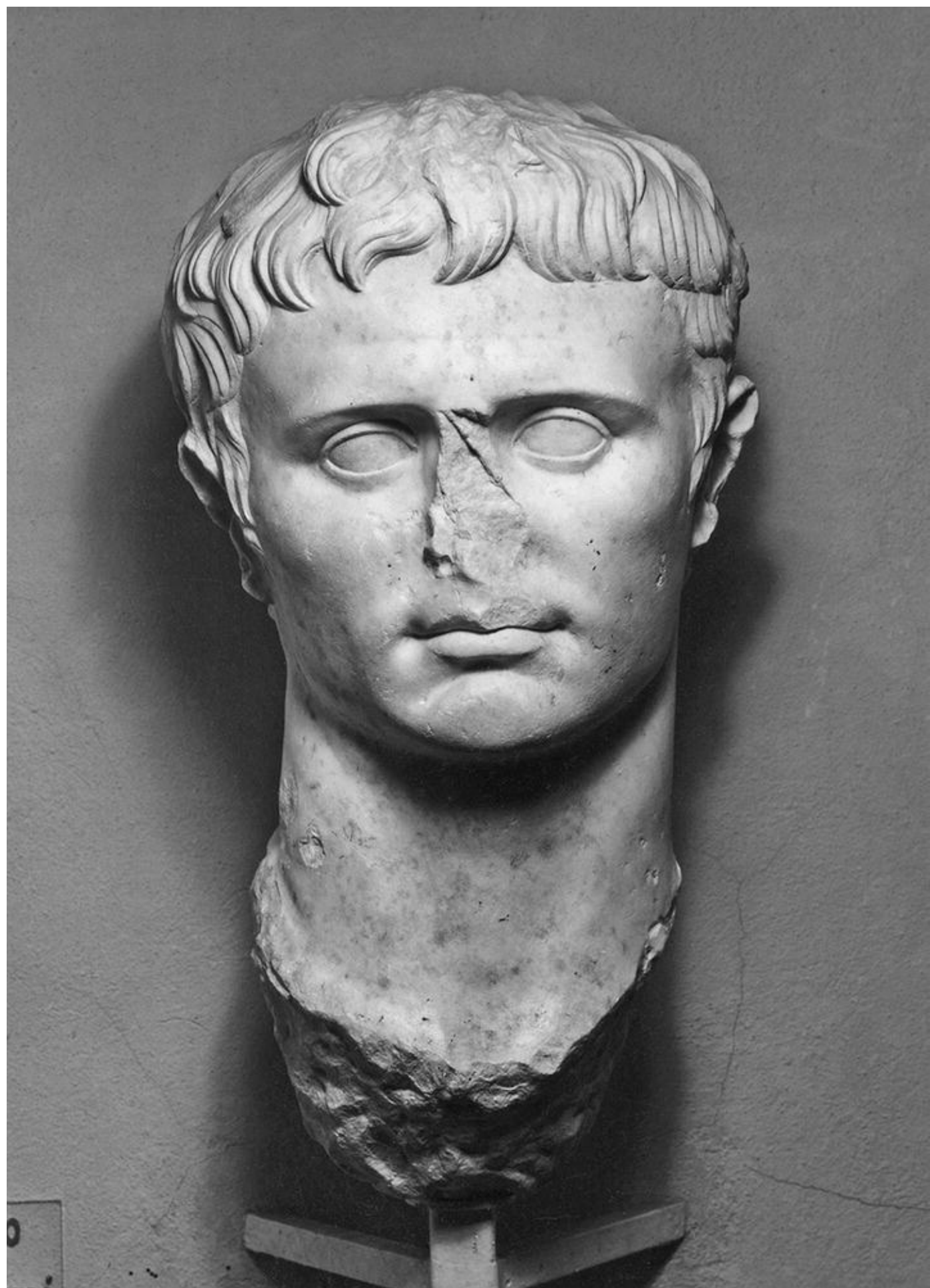


Figure 3.8 Marble portrait of Augustus, Prima Porta type, posthumous Claudian copy; Volterra, Museo Guarnacci.

Photo: G. Fittschen-Badura.

Naming Portrait Types

Various procedures have been established in the field for naming emperors' portrait types. Max Wegner, who was one of the first to become deeply involved with portrait types, named them after their respective best or best-preserved replicas (e.g., "portrait type Museo Capitolino, Imperatori 38" for the latest portrait type of Marcus Aurelius: Wegner 1939, 45–46); although that sounds rather complicated, it does have the advantage that it creates no prejudices with respect to dating and interpretation.

Scholars also often name portrait types after the supposed reason of their creation (e.g., Trajan's "decennial bust"). This is not unproblematic, because the reason for creation is not always certain (such as in the case just named). Numbering the portrait types is only sensible if all portrait types of an emperor and their sequence are actually known (such as for Marcus Aurelius or his wife Faustina the Younger). For Augustus' portrait types, for example, this is not possible because it is still contested whether the "Forbes type" was created before or after the Prima Porta type.

Systematic, Gradual Modification of the Portrait Types of Young Emperors

Among the portraits depicting Marcus Aurelius as a young heir to the throne (Fittschen 1999, 22–31, pls. 25–53), there are replicas that are entirely beardless; others with signs of a first beard on the cheeks, chin, and upper lip; and still others with a full beard while all the other aspects of the type, particularly the hairstyle, are unchanged. Apparently the aging process of the prince was meant to be shown without creating an entirely new portrait type every few years. The changes to the beard were made in clearly discernible phases; that is, they were not arbitrary. The workshops could not carry out these changes independently; they required the instructions of an authorized body, since the same (datable) changes can be seen in the coin portraits of Marcus Aurelius. Similar processes were also used for the portraits of other princes and young emperors (e.g., for Lucius Verus, Commodus, Caracalla and Geta, Elagabalus, and Severus Alexander); they can first be observed in the portraits of Nero. This is the clearest evidence for the existence of an office for imperial portraits (Fittschen 2008, 111–115). No conventional term has yet been invented to describe these phenomena—M. Bergmann speaks of "new editions" (*Bildnisneuauflage*) of portraits (Bergmann 1978, 40); D. Boschung prefers to recognize a separate new type with each beard change (Boschung 2005, 540). More appropriate would be the description "type adjustment" (*Typusanpassung*).

How Can Copies of an Emperor's Portrait Type Be Identified? Copy Review

Portrait types are characterized by a series of distinctive identifiers established by the designing artist. These allow copies of a portrait type to be recognized. The hairstyles with their individual motifs are among these, as well as, of course, personal physiognomic characteristics such as head shape, facial features, or expression; but we can see that the various portrait types of an emperor differ less with respect to physiognomy than with respect to hairstyles. In portraits on which the hair has not been preserved, for example, it is generally possible to identify the emperor (or member of the imperial house), but not the type on which it is based. Simply put: portrait types are primarily defined by their hairstyles.

For further assessment, in a first step, all preserved portraits with the same hairstyle (and the same physiognomy) that clearly trace back to a common model owing to their shared characteristics (the portrait type) must be collected. The number of preserved copies of a portrait type varies widely depending on the number of copies produced in antiquity. The highest number of copies is preserved for Augustus' Prima Porta type, which was copied during the entire rule of the Julio-Claudian dynasty—that is, over a period of 95 years—and even afterwards ([Figures 3.7–3.8](#)).

In the next step, the collected copies need to be compared with one another. To do so, it is essential that sufficient photographs of all copies be available. Sufficient means photos of all sides, including those that were not intended to be viewed (e.g., backs); most of the remaining unresolved problems in the research on portraiture are simply due to the publication of too many portraits in front view only.

The goal of comparing replicas (the “copy review”) is to ascertain the trustworthiness of each copy in relation to the type. The procedure is the same as that used for the analysis of classical Greek ideal and portrait sculpture that is preserved only in imperial-era copies. (As has already been mentioned, the copyists of emperors' portraits took their methods from the copyists of Greek sculptures.) The more one copy has in common with others, the greater the likelihood that it reproduces the portrait type exactly and faithfully. Only the most faithful copies that form a core group allow an assessment of the artistic goals of the designing sculptor and the “portrait intentions” of the commissioner (e.g., the emperor).

Nevertheless, the copies that are ruled out as less precise are not at all without research value. They provide insights into the methods and processes of the workshops and the reception history of a portrait type. The latter is most instructive for a portrait type that was copied over as long a time period as the Prima Porta type of Augustus.

Why Do Copies of One Portrait Type Often Differ So Much? The Methods of the Copying Workshops

Studying copies of a portrait type quickly reveals just how great the differences between

copies can be, so that it is often difficult for an untrained viewer to recognize and accept the affiliation of any specific portrait with a particular portrait type. These deviations from the core group of copies are at first hard to understand. To some, they even make copy review appear suspect and, ultimately, superfluous as a working method, as it does not seem to provide binding results. Yet it would be an inappropriate conclusion to abandon copy review entirely. On the contrary, what needs to be taken into consideration is the working processes of the copying workshops—a field of research that is still at an early stage.

Copies in the imperial era were probably mainly made by using measuring points, which allow precise measurements to be transferred from the model to the copy (Pfanner 1989, 236–251). On some portraits of emperors as well as private persons, such measuring points were not removed, but remained after completion of the copy. This does not appear to be the result of negligence. They were probably meant to suggest to the buyer that he had purchased a faithful, reliable copy. In some of the verifiable cases, however, the copy was not as faithful as the measuring points suggested (Bergmann 1978, 15–17, figs. pp. 44–48). The measuring points that were left behind could therefore also have been intended to deceive.

This permits us to identify at least one of the reasons for imprecise, deviating copies: cost. Good copies that faithfully replicated the portrait type from every angle were, of course, more expensive than those in which the type characteristics were only reproduced in a more simplified manner. Such simplifications could be made anywhere, but primarily appeared in areas that were less visible or entirely invisible. In second-century portraits of emperors, for instance, such simplifications can be observed primarily in the amount of drilling in the hair and in the polishing of the surface. In high-quality, faithful copies, the hair is always structured by drilling channels equally on all sides; if these were omitted on the back and the sides, the copyist naturally spared some labor, which made the copy cheaper. The number of drilling channels is often considered a dating criterion (the more, the later); as a simple blanket statement, however, this cannot stand—drilling channels are above all an indication of quality.

The highest level of perfection was finally achieved by polishing the surfaces of face and hair. Only a few examples of this level of quality survive; significantly, scholars often consider them to be modern copies, because they deviate so conspicuously from the appearance of the bulk of ancient portraits. The different production phases were probably carried out by different sculptors, with the drilling and polishing being done by the most experienced and the raw versions being made by beginners. The question of cost provides a possible explanation for the differences between copies.

In many cases, the copies were not only simplified, but altered as well; the copyists apparently felt free to deviate from the models in the less crucial places. Especially with regard to the physiognomy, the copyist could also intervene with his own interpretation, presumably by agreement with the customer: wrinkles that were present in the portrait type, for example, could be reduced or emphasized, which considerably changed the overall facial expression (e.g., Bergmann 1978, 15, figs. 11–13).

The question of how many elements of the portrait type must, at a minimum, be present in a copy in order to adjoin it with the type is a matter of discretion. A few elements suffice to

show that the sculptor was not entirely free, but rather had a model available. However, where such elements cannot be identified, a portrait should not be classified among the copies of a particular type, and not even among imperial portraits in general, because there are other possible explanations for a superficial similarity to an emperor's portrait. Certainly, such portraits of uncertain allotment must never be made a starting point for further attributions. Scholarship will be better served, in such cases, by leaving the matter unresolved.

Special Problems in Copy Review I: Emperors' Portraits in the Provinces

According to widely held assumptions, emperors' portraits found in the provinces of the Roman Empire—that is, outside of Rome and Italy—deviate more widely from or are entirely independent of the official portrait types (Zanker 1983; Riccardi 2000, 105–132). This hypothesis sounds plausible at first, but cannot actually be proven.

On the one hand, it is indisputable that the copyists in the provinces were familiar with the official portrait types and copied them. After all, precise copies have also been found in the provinces. Deviations do admittedly occur more frequently there, but again, one reason for this may be cost. In addition, at least in the Greek-speaking parts of the Empire, workshop traditions were very influential. So, for example, the academically precise rendering of the hair of head and beard, so typical of the workshops in the City of Rome in the first half of the second century, is almost never found in eastern portraits of emperors; the hair on these is rather roughly executed, making the copies appear less precise.

For portraits from the provinces that deviate particularly widely, the question arises, however, of whether the identifications as Roman emperors that are generally considered certain are in fact correct. In individual cases, there is evidence that these identifications are wrong (Fittschen 2006, 48, no. 20); in other cases, the question has not yet been resolved or cannot be resolved at all because there is no confirming inscription.

Special Problems in Copy Review II: Reworked Portraits of Emperors

It has long been known that ancient portraits were reworked and adapted for reuse. This concerns portraits of emperors as well as private portraits. The latter were reworked almost exclusively for economic reasons; the number of reworked private portraits increased after the third century CE with alarming frequency. Portraits of emperors, by contrast, were always reworked as a consequence of a *damnatio memoriae*, a targeted erasure from memory (Bergmann and Zanker 1981; Varner 2004). Only under Diocletian and Constantine did it become common for portraits of “good” emperors to be reworked as well. As far as is currently known, the portraits of proscribed emperors were only reused for other emperors; to date, no private portrait has been proven with certainty to have been reworked from an imperial portrait.

Reworking of portraits in the round can only be identified as such when remnants of the original portrait remain. Fortunately, this is often the case, because the sculptures were only reworked in the easily visible areas, either for reasons of cost or lack of time. Thus it is sometimes even possible not only to identify the emperor whose portrait was reworked, but even his original portrait type.

Reworked portraits often deviate considerably from other portraits of the same emperor that were not based on recycled heads. This results from the difficulties in creating a new portrait from an old one. Faces had to be carved back and hairstyles had to be transformed. That is why, although the newly depicted emperor can usually be identified, a particular portrait type can only rarely be recognized. Yet it must be assumed that the reworking has occurred on the basis of an official model, because a freehand revision would have been far too risky.

Special Problems in Copy Review III: Combination of Portrait Types (*Bildnis-Klitterungen*)

In many portraits of emperors, starting already with those of Augustus but above all on those of Trajan and Hadrian, motifs of different portrait types were evidently combined with one another. The reasons for this are as yet unclear, but are probably to be found in the workshops. Perhaps the copies were meant to be “improved” in this way. The phenomenon was presumably encouraged by the great similarity between the different portrait types of the abovementioned emperors.

Combinations of portrait types of *different* emperors are another variant: there are portraits that follow a portrait type of Antoninus Pius or Lucius Verus on the back, but clearly show Septimius Severus or Commodus on the front (Fittschen 2005, 93–94). No explanation has yet been found for this previously scarcely noticed phenomenon.

Dating Copies of Imperial Portrait Types

Naturally, copies can only be produced after a model has been constructed. If the date of a portrait type’s creation is known, it provides a *terminus post quem* for the copies that are made after this model. For the many emperors with short reigns, the question of precise dating of the copies is not one of great importance. This does not apply, however, to deified emperors whose portraits continued to be copied after their death. Posthumous portraits of the deified emperors of the second century, which certainly existed, have not yet been identified with certainty. They would only be recognizable and datable based on their style. By contrast, the posthumous portraits of Augustus are by now well known due to the complete collection of extant copies (Boschung 1993a). Based on the changing styles of rendering the hair, they can be relatively accurately dated by comparisons with portraits of later emperors. This comparison also shows that the physiognomy of the deified emperor was more or less clearly assimilated to that of the currently ruling emperor, although the hairstyle motif that determines the type was always maintained ([Figures 3.7–3.8](#)). This case demonstrates how much interpretive scope the

copyists had with respect to the portrait type (Trillmich 1971).

Why Do Some Private Portraits Bear Such a Resemblance to the Portraits of Emperors? Assimilated Portraiture (*Bildnisangleichung*) and Period Faces (*Zeitgesicht*)

It has long been noticed that many portraits of private persons resemble those of emperors. This similarity is the most important aid in dating them. It applies not only to the appropriation of an emperor's hairstyle and beard, but, surprisingly, to physiognomic characteristics as well. This phenomenon is known as "assimilated portraiture." The assimilation is frequently restricted to mere quotations, but there are also cases of complete assimilation, which make it difficult even for experts to determine whether or not the portrait is of a nameless Roman or an emperor ([Figures 3.9–3.10](#)). It can be assumed that such assimilation was requested by the customer. Assimilations to portraits of Julius Caesar, Trajan, and Hadrian occur in particularly large numbers; however, they exist in all periods of the imperial era up to Constantine. The phenomenon is known in post-antique cultures as well. Roman citizens apparently had a strong desire to look like the emperor.

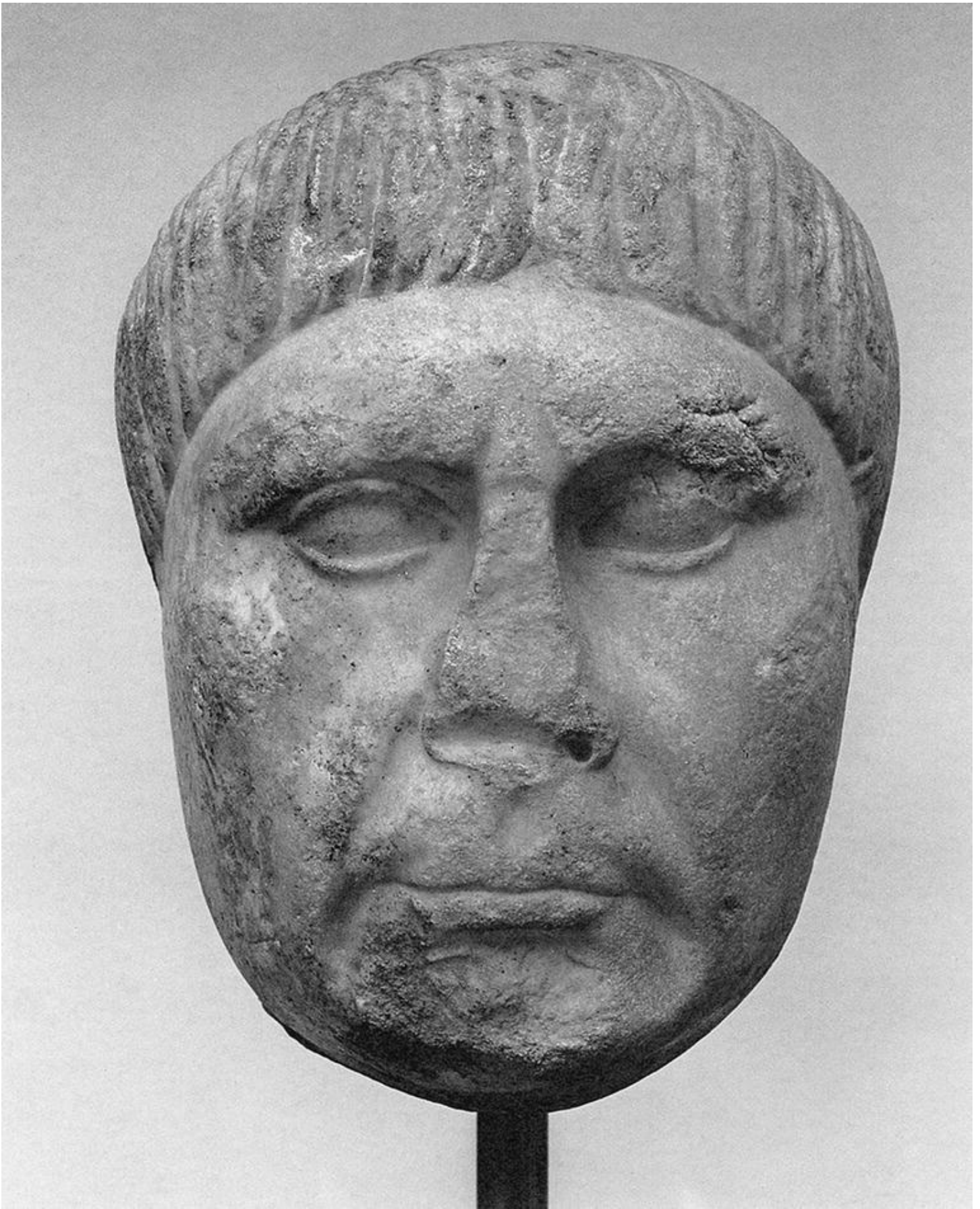


Figure 3.9 Marble portrait of Trajan, Ascension type; Frankfurt, Liebieghaus, inv. I.N. 156.

Photo: Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung.



Figure 3.10 Marble portrait of Trajan as victor or an unknown priest with “Phrygian” cap. Rome, Museo Capitolino, inv. 2967.

Photo: G. Fittschen-Badura.

In scholarship, the denomination “assimilated portraiture” competes with the term “period face,” which is increasingly popular because it is so memorable and also quite easy to translate. The latter means that the similarities between imperial and private portraits are not based on a conscious individual decision so much as on a general contemporary taste that seized a large part of the population and could also take hold over longer periods. In this concept, the question regarding who or what sparked this taste is avoided, although it is acknowledged that the emperors played an important role in this. The term “period face” thus has a certain imprecision and becomes even less concise when scholars start postulating competing simultaneous period faces (Zanker and Cain in Fittschen, Zanker, and Cain 2010, 28, no. 14). Therefore, it is best left unused.

Is It Always the Emperors Who Influence Their Citizens?

The phenomena of assimilated portraiture and period face are based on the superior position that the emperor and his family had in imperial society. The idea that they always had an exclusive and decisive impact on the fashion and self-representation of the citizens therefore appears plausible. However, there are indications that the emperors, in turn, also picked up fashion trends that had arisen in society prior to their reign, which then of course resulted in them becoming significantly more popular. The best example is Hadrian’s much-discussed beard, which was popular among young people long before his accession to power and is encountered through nearly the entire first century CE. Another example is the military short hairstyle that is adopted in imperial iconography with Caracalla and Geta.

Given that private portraits are usually dated after the portraits of emperors, it is, of course, difficult to show whether and when the former preceded the latter in the development of fashion.

Did All Roman Citizens Want to Resemble the Emperors and Empresses in Their Portraits? The Phenomenon of Non-assimilation

The term period face suggests that all Romans wanted to look like the given ruling emperor. However, this view would be one-sided and there are exceptions, even if their number appears to be limited. Female private portraits show much greater variation in hairstyle than those of the women of the emperors’ families, and some female citizens could not only keep up with such women in terms of extravagance, but even wanted to surpass them.

Among the male portraits, there are a number of examples from the first half of the second

century CE that differ markedly from the contemporary imperial portraits with respect to their hairstyle and beard as well as their realistic physiognomy. The reasons for this deviation from the prevailing norm and its associated intentions are as yet unclear. Whether these phenomena also existed in the first century CE is equally unresolved, due to the difficulty of dating non-assimilated portraits. The relative certainty with which the non-assimilated portraits of the second century can be dated is due to certain formal, datable innovations, to be discussed in what follows.

Dating Private Portraits: Portrait Assimilation and Style

There are only very few private portraits that can be firmly dated through inscriptions. The date of the bulk of private portraits is unknown. It can only be inferred through comparison with identified and dated portraits of emperors. The more similar these portraits are to the portraits of an emperor, the easier a chronological classification becomes. It must be kept in mind, however, that there were also assimilations to non-contemporary imperial models. For instance, many of the private portraits that were assimilated to portraits of Julius Caesar were only created in the Augustan era.

That is why all other available dating criteria have to be included as well. The first of these is the style; that is easiest to ascertain by looking at the rendering of the hair. For such a stylistic analysis it is also imperative that the specific styles of the workshops of the various production centers be taken into account. Paying attention to the workshop style is crucial, because a uniform development of style throughout the empire did not exist, although it is often tacitly assumed in scholarship.

Other Possibilities for Dating Private Portraits: Bust Types and Plastic Rendering of the Eyes

The objects that supported the portrait heads (statues, busts, funerary reliefs, sarcophagi, and so on) can also provide valuable information about the time in which private portraits were created. The bust form, the development of which can be clearly traced in the busts of emperors, has proven particularly helpful in this regard. The busts gradually became larger and wider after their first appearance in the Augustan era, and in the Hadrianic period they reached a format that then remained canonical for a long time. During the later second and third century, busts occasionally even depicted the arms in their full length. Early in the third century, small busts came back into fashion. It remains unclear for the first century CE whether the scale of the busts alone or their sculptural articulation as well is determinative of the time of their creation; dates based on busts are therefore always rather tentative in this period. By contrast, busts of the Trajanic and Hadrianic eras can be categorized quite precisely.

Dating information can also be gained from the form of the bases and the *tabulae*, at least for works from the City of Rome. Bases appear beneath busts only relatively late, apparently under Nero; they have the form of a flat disc, sometimes with a small rectangular *tabula*. How

the older busts were supported has not yet been determined. The classic form of base and *tabula* is first documented in the Trajanic period and remains in use almost unchanged until late in the third century. They can be made in one piece together with the bust or separately.

During the Hadrianic period it became common to indicate the irises and pupils through cavities in the eyeballs (what is known as *Augenbohrung* or “eye drilling”); prior to that the eyes were painted, but traces of paint are preserved only rarely. Eye drilling spread very quickly throughout the empire, so that it provides a useful *terminus post quem* (and for portraits on which they are absent, a *terminus ante quem*). Yet, as always, there are exceptions to this rule, so that eye drilling should be used for dating only in combination with other dating criteria. Eye drilling could take various shapes, and some scholars believe that it allows for more precise identification of the time and place of creation, but no consistently usable results have yet been produced.

Can Roman Portraits Be Dated Based on a General Stylistic Development?

It is undisputed that Roman portrait sculpture developed from a realistic, psychologizing, and individualized mode of representation in the late Republican era to a supra-individual mode of formulaic abstraction that began to appear during the Tetrarchy. However, this development was in no way linear, but was often influenced by non-stylistic, ideological aims. The art of portraiture is more exposed to this type of influence than other artistic media. The changes in portraiture under Augustus, for example, cannot be explained as a “natural” development of the prior style. The influence of Gallienus’ political ideology on his portraiture is more obvious still (the “Gallienic Renaissance”). Elagabalus’ second portrait type (219 CE) interrupts what was at first a consistent stylistic development with a return to older models (this had only minimal impact on private portraits, however, due to the short lifespan of the emperor).

The lack of a unified style can also be seen in the simultaneity of realistic and idealized modes of representation, which has led scholars to some misguided conclusions. To what degree portraiture could occasionally detach itself from the stylistic development in other artistic media is particularly noticeable in the sarcophagus reliefs of the third century, in which the portrait heads differ markedly from the rest.

As far as dating undated portraits is concerned, it follows that only individual comparisons with dated portraits can ever lead to sustainable results, while drawing on supposed stylistic developments can be grossly misleading.

Future Tasks

As already indicated, sufficient documentation of monuments is essential to the field of research described here. Although the situation has clearly improved in recent years, a state of ideal documentation has in no way been reached. The sculptural monuments of many museums are still only partly or not at all published in a manner that is up to the standards of scientific

research. Because of this deficiency, it is still scarcely possible to address workshop questions systematically; research on Attic vase painting is, in this respect, far ahead of that on portraits. Not only do the methods of these portrait workshops and their local or regional idiosyncrasies need to be more precisely determined, but uncertainties with respect to the chronology of some portraits could also be clarified with the help of the workshops.

On the other hand, there are narrow limits to the often demanded “research on context,” because the ancient contexts have either not been documented during the long history of excavations since the Renaissance (and sometimes even up to now), or they have been thoroughly disturbed during late antiquity or the Middle Ages. The inclusion of portraits in other media (funerary altars, sarcophagi, non-imperial coins, and gems), however, would allow scholars to gain important insights into the sociology of this group of artifacts.

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

The methodology for evaluating Roman portraiture that is described here is outlined in Fittschen (1976, 219–252, particularly 220–224); in more detail and with more recent relevant literature in Fittschen (2010). For the imperial portrait types referenced, see Fittschen and Zanker (1983 and 1985); for the relationship between portraits of emperors and private portraits and for the phenomenon of private portraits with replicas, see Fittschen et al. (2010). The history of research into Roman portraits is comprehensively described by Bažant (1995). Fejfer (2008) provides an introduction into the range of questions connected with Roman portraits.

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CHAPTER 4

Roman Art and Gender Studies

Natalie Kampen†

Introduction

Theoretical framework

Ever since the historian Joan Wallach Scott entitled a paper “Gender: A useful category of historical analysis” in 1986, archaeologists and art historians have been aware that interesting new questions and themes could emerge as a result of exploration of even the most well-known visual materials by using this lens (Scott 1999, 28–52). In this chapter, I take up some of the theoretical strands in current use and the contributions being made to the writing of Roman art history that have resulted from the consideration of gender, and I offer a brief sense of some of the areas as yet underdeveloped. In the process, I will note some of the uses of various theoretical models for specific Roman monuments.

Gender studies in Roman art history can be understood as rooted in contemporary historical and cultural theories as well as theories produced by feminist and gay scholars and critical race theorists. The usual Francophone suspects, from Derrida (1987) and Kristeva (2001) to Foucault (1978–86) and Bourdieu (1994), combine with the likes of Stuart Hall (2003a), Kobena Mercer (1994), or Raymond Williams (1973); to these we can add a range of feminist theorists with a major impact on art historians, including Judith Butler (1990), Laura Mulvey (1989), and Gayatri C. Spivak (1987). And this merely scratches the surface of half a century’s rich body of theoretical creativity throughout the humanities and social sciences. The ferment in archaeological circles over theoretical models, although it has had less impact on classical archaeology than on other areas, has played its role, particularly in the feminist archaeology of Joan Gero and Margaret Conkey (1991) or Roberta Gilchrist (1999). Even work by scientists such as Stephen Jay Gould (1981) and Donna Haraway (1989) belongs in the mix. Their influence in the dismantling of numerous long-held assumptions about how science and scientific progress work is important, because they have made explicit the effects of those assumptions on research connected to gender and race. This new theoretical work is detectable beneath the surface of much current scholarship, because it reconfigures the kinds of questions being asked. To some degree gender studies, or the theoretical frameworks within which it is being forged, have had an impact on art historians and archaeologists who are absorbing the ideas unconsciously.

Feminist theory as a critical practice rather than as a specific methodology on the order of contextual or formal analysis has been perhaps the greatest creative inspiration for gender studies in art history (Butler and Scott, 1992, 341–368). Equally a critical practice, gender study takes up the mantle of feminist scholarship. It follows comparable moves in

anthropological archaeology, history, and literary analysis that insist on the scholar's conscious reflection on her or his own cultural position and acknowledgment of his or her scholarly and theoretical assumptions (e.g., Rosaldo 1994). Much scholarship on Roman art in the twentieth century has been deeply philosophical and often explicitly political, as one can see for example in the work of Guido Kaschnitz von Weinberg (1965) or Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli (1950). The former engaged with Platonic issues of artistic structure, the latter with the implications of Marxist thought on the analysis of artistic context. At the same time, though, Roman art history has tended to resemble most humanistic fields in taking the author's position as in no need of explicit acknowledgment (for an overview of the philosophical underpinnings of Roman art history, see Brendel 1979). This has been true both for the empirical collection and analysis of data as well as for the production of a universal theory or a master narrative in which the author has no explicit vested interests. Here both Josef Strzygowski, long associated with the racist positions current in Central Europe in the first part of the twentieth century (1902), and Bianchi Bandinelli, a member of the Italian Communist Party after the Second World War (1967a and b), provide contrasting exceptions, but the complexity of the unacknowledged becomes visible in the writing of Gerhard Rodenwaldt (1939) before his death by suicide during the Second World War. For feminist scholarship, on which so much gender studies work is based, neither position is tenable, and, as with current anthropological studies, the "standpoint" and investments of the scholar must become visible, just as do those of his or her objects of investigation (e.g., Harding 1993; Hartsock 1998, esp. 105–132). This hardly guarantees a correct answer to every question, but it does permit the reader a sense that the author is a little less Olympian than was once the norm. And it has facilitated the presence of work that is explicitly politically engaged, as is the case for some work both on women and on male sexuality, since a number of authors see themselves responsible for speaking and for speaking from a distinctive position about what may earlier have been silenced, intentionally or inadvertently (e.g., Kampen 1994; Lyons and Pappadopoulos 2002). Lesbian and gay studies of the past have become extremely important, and scholars in these areas have helped to open up new questions, including those concerned with the nature of sexual imagery and the relationship of visibility to desire (Brooten 1996; Clarke 1998; Hubbard 2003).

Rethinking and reusing the canon

Gender studies depends not on new corpora of material objects and sites, but rather on their reexamination and exposure to different kinds of questions, including those that scholars with explicit political investments have posed. However, a gender studies perspective does often open our eyes to neglected or misunderstood material. Acknowledging the need to rethink, for example, the study of funerary imagery, and using epigraphy and archaeological evidence along with visual representation, have allowed the exploration of representations of men and women within specific rank and status locations (e.g., Waelkens 1986; Lovén 2001; Petersen 2006). It also means that historians too now have more information about the interaction of gender and social status or gender and geographical location than they did when their only data came from elite written sources and the law.

Exploring the particular ways in which women and men are represented on funerary

monuments from the various provinces has likewise permitted insight into corpora only recently becoming easily accessible to outsiders. The distinctive ways in which women could be depicted both in their home territories and as incomers elsewhere combine with insights into the forms of representation for men and children, slaves as well as free. A tomb pillar ([Figure 4.1](#); Massow 1932: 162–163, Nr. 184, fig. 106, pls. 32, 34) with reliefs showing the members of the family of a well-to-do merchant of the second or third century from the Mosel region in Germany makes a revealing comparison with the stele of a couple in Phrygian Asia Minor, dated to around the same time ([Figure 4.2](#); Waelkens 1986, 109, no. 253, pl. 42; cf. Baltzer 1983; Langner 2001). Economic distinctions emerge from the scenes of the merchant's business activities, his use of leisure time to hunt, and his ability to support his wife's slaves in their attendance on her appearance. The Phrygian stone puts the couple's lives not into figural scenes of people doing their various activities, but into emblematic form. It places against the two panels of a door (to the house, the tomb, the beyond?) a set of objects that act as indices for identity and activity. The husband's plow and ox and his writing implements attest to his occupation and his literacy, whereas his wife's objects reveal the conventional attributes of the good wife: wool basket and lock plates (frequently also cosmetic jars, mirrors, and slippers). Although the comparison demonstrates the need to look at objects (and gender) within their local contexts, at the same time feminine beauty and domestic occupations and virtues repeat throughout the Empire and show how rarely women were commemorated for their varied activities outside the household (Kampen 1981).



Figure 4.1 Detail of the “Elternpaarpfeiler” from Neumagen showing the woman at her toilette.

Photo: Ton Derks.

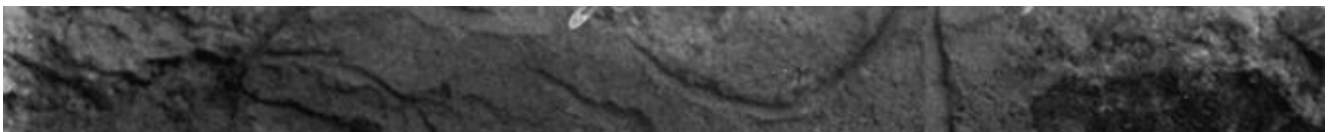




Figure 4.2 Door stele of Aelios Phrougios and family, from Kutahya, now Ankara, Roman Baths.

Photo: M. Schede 1926, Neg. D-DAI-IST-3504, with kind permission from Ankara Müze Müdürlüğü.

Inquiring into the nature of erotic imagery has similarly meant a more comprehensive analysis

and nuanced understanding of well-known images, and not just those that show sexual intercourse, although they too have begun to be reexamined as participants in a world where imagery can both contradict and also complement textual evidence (Clarke 1998). A number of scholars trained in textual analysis have begun to rethink some sexual imagery in the light of elegiac poetry and its construction of particular kinds of lovers and love-making, and questions are being raised about the ways in which such imagery may also participate in systems of verbal as well as visual humor (Myerowitz 1992; Kellum 1996; Valladares 2005). This is the case as well for the depiction of eroticized male and female figures, objects of desire now being discussed with greater subtlety and psychological depth than ever before as a result of the sophisticated fusion of the methods and materials of classics and art history/classical archaeology. It would appear that the topic of sexuality in the visual arts requires such interdisciplinarity both of training and of methods.

Although for years the mythological paintings of the Bay of Naples have provoked interest for their erotic content, recent efforts to explore a wide range of materials in order to understand the social and psychic patterns they form has produced a richer sense of the visual environment as pervaded with a highly sensualized imagery. The relationship between the sensual and sexual bodies on display and the flowers, birds, fruits, and landscapes that surround them may be of equal interest (Lorenz 2008; Bergmann 2008). This realm also has generated interest from scholars who explore the psychoanalytic implications of many of the mythological paintings. Interesting work comes, again, from the creative fusion of textual and visual analysis, as in discussions of the troubled sexuality of a figure such as Narcissus ([Figure 4.3](#); Elsner 1996). Not only do we see him in the context of sensual imagery within specific rooms and thus particular viewing contexts, we also encounter him as the self-absorbed viewer of a kind of naturalistic art/nature that poses a mortal threat to the youth and an intellectual challenge to the audience. This kind of work demonstrates nicely some fundamental principles of gender studies: its interdisciplinarity and its openness to existing methods and corpora of material.



Figure 4.3 Wall painting of Narcissus, north wall of cubiculum i of the House of Marcus Lucretius Fronto, Pompeii.

Photo: Katharina Lorenz.

A comparable concern with the eroticized play of text and image can be seen as well in recent work on the huge corpus of statues and reliefs showing Antinoos, beloved of the emperor Hadrian ([Figure 4.4](#); Kampen 2007; Vout 2007). From a base of catalogues bringing together

the more than 100 possible portraits, several scholars have taken up the issue of the nature of the emotional as well as the sexual relationship between emperor and beloved. Not only does this scholarship explore the contradiction between the images and the vituperative texts about the relationship, thus revealing once more the complicated negotiation between words and images, but it takes on the psychology of homoerotic relationships among Rome's highest strata and the functions of such relationships in the politics of the high Empire. The way in which the statues of Antinoos influenced sculpted portraits of other beloved youths, whether their relationships to their mentors was sexual or not, allows us to see the impact of sculpture made in the court ambient on that outside it, as for example on the household of the noble Sophist Herodes Atticus of Greece (Vout 2005). It also allows us to imagine the way in which imperial conduct might enable or permit homoerotic acts and feelings for others as they emulate their rulers.



Figure 4.4 Antinoos Farnese. Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, inv. 6030.

Photo: Schwanke, Neg. [D-DAI-ROM-83.1889](#).

The need for much more work in these and many other areas remains obvious from the growing mountains of evidence (especially provenanced evidence) and new excavations. An interesting question emerging from the process of excavation itself is how the historicized desires of the archaeologist shape both what is found or noticed in a find (choosing to work on grand villas rather than crossroads settlements, for example, and consequently missing the chance to understand the work and dwelling patterns of women and men in non-elite contexts) and how it is understood (wishing to read a new portrait or a tomb as associated with a known important woman or discussing the find only in terms of the named men in a family).

Gender as Women. Women into Gender

Finding the women

On a heuristic level, it is useful to divide art-historical work on gender in the Roman world, certainly in the Anglophone and German academic settings, into three historiographic phases: work on women, on gender relations, and on gender and sexuality. Although historically the categories often overlap, the process of division compensates for its arbitrariness by revealing a little about the development of scholarship since the late 1960s.

Studies of the depiction of women have often been a part of art historians' explorations of Roman art, whether in Pompeian wall painting (as mythological or erotic figures), in "historical" relief sculpture (as personifications or empresses), in funerary art, and in portraiture. Studies of the imperial women's portraits were a staple of the field from early in the twentieth century and remain so, although only recently have they become participants in the larger move to embed works of art in political and social as well as art history (e.g., Fittschen 1982; Bartman 1999; Wood 1999; Alexandridis 2004). By the 1970s, nevertheless, feminist historians had begun, however tentatively, to "look for women" in the existing data, and a few art historians were motivated to follow (the first seems to have been Verena Paul-Zinserling; Zinserling 1972). Some of the work that resulted was recuperative or compensatory, in the sense that it sought to put missing or "silent" women into the historical record or to combat scholarship whose unselfconscious sexism had not been challenged in print. Some went further, for example pointing the way for analysis of gender in Augustan public monuments and the role of gender in imperial ideology (e.g., Kleiner 1978); this has developed into one of the richest areas of further work, not least because the Ara Pacis Augustae seems to be the earliest state monument to combine the men of the imperial court and government with the emperor's own family members ([Figures 10.4–10.5](#)). Not only do these relationships provide important information about the new uses of the portraits of women and children in imperial political and ideological structures, they find amplification in the personifications, the divinities, the legendary figures, and even the natural world that spread over the walls (Rose 1990; Uzzi 2005). Family embedded in politics, history, ritual, and nature

represents a new vision under Augustus. The imagery provided early effort on the study of women with some of its most coherent and exciting material, and the Ara Pacis continues to offer its gifts in a way utterly consistent with its overflowing imagery (Milnor 2005).

Within a few years of this initial work on women's images in Roman art history, the first biographical sketches of important women scholars in archaeology and art history began to appear in encyclopedias and companions. Unfortunately, relatively little work has been done since to develop these biographies of women, either as documents for a fuller history of classical art history and archaeology or for a feminist history (but see Sherman 1981; Cohen and Joukovsky 2004; Nicotra 2004). A biography of Eugenie Sellers Strong (Dyson 2004) appeared, as did an exhibition about Esther van Deman (Einaudi 1991), and a sprinkling of articles exists, but more needs to be done to assess the ways in which women scholars took up or resisted thinking about women and gender as their subjects and the circumstances that helped to shape the gender politics of their scholarship (Bolger 1994; Halporn 1999). This seems especially interesting given that some of these scholars were influenced by earlier waves of feminism or felt the effects of sex discrimination in their own careers. The forthcoming publication by Larissa Bonfante of a major study on Margarete Bieber may start to remedy this gap, but it suggests riches to be found as well in discussions of gender in the forthcoming biographical studies of emigré scholars, men and women alike, of the 1930s.

Feminist recuperative work provided evidence of a usable corpus and a need to "notice" women, so it necessarily preceded the development of more complex theoretical frameworks. By the 1980s the fruits of this labor had begun to ripen. Studies of the tombstones of people of non-elite status in Rome and elsewhere started to dig into the depiction of women as well as the representation of "daily life" and occupations ([Figure 4.5](#); Kampen 1981; Zimmer 1982; Baltzer 1983; more recently esp. Clarke 2003). In addition, explorations of the way in which low-ranking women were depicted at work on monuments made on their behalf as opposed to those made for people of higher strata began to reveal not only the different kinds of work men and women did, but the role that social status played in both iconography and style. This discussion of social location was rooted not only in the theories of Rodenwaldt (1940) in the 1930s and Bianchi Bandinelli and his students in the 1960s (1967a and b); it found influential form as well in the significant essay by Paul Zanker (1975) on "freedmen's reliefs" from the mid-1970s and the book by Diana Kleiner (1977) on this same corpus of sculpture. Although relatively little attention was paid in this foundational literature to the question of gender, once feminist theory had begun to move from the recuperative initial stage to an insistence on broadening the conversation in order to acknowledge the relationships of men and women, it became obvious that both gender difference and gender similarity needed exploration.

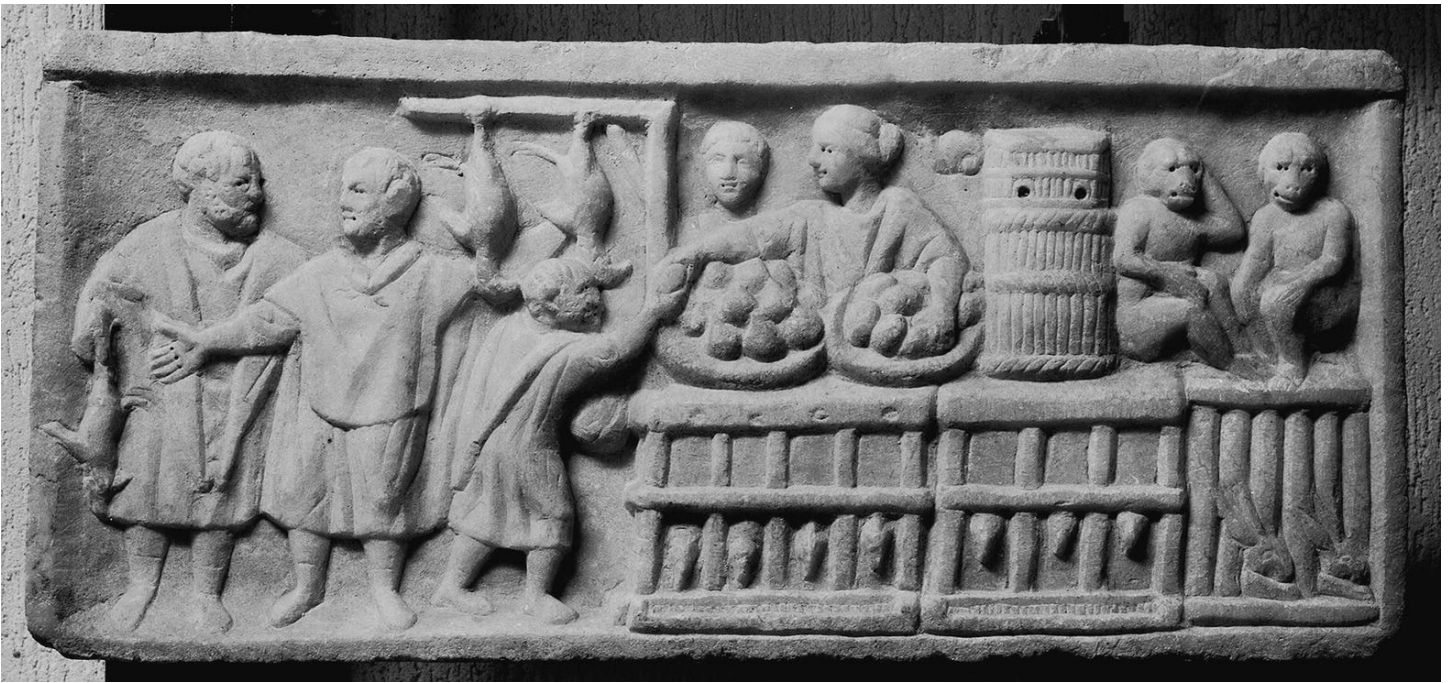


Figure 4.5 Relief from a shop front at Ostia, Regio III, Via della Foce. Ostia, Museum, inv. 134.

Photo: Schwanke, Neg. D-DAI-ROM-803236.

Gender relations

Gender was now seen as a social construction, relational in nature, such that any category could only exist, and could only take its form, in relation to (meaning in conversation or opposition, negotiation or even violent struggle with) others (Kampen 1996a). An essential point for the more theorized work of the 1980s and 1990s, relationality shaped studies of Roman women as much of gender as of category (Benjamin 1988; Dimen and Goldner 2002). The model of the structuralist binary, self and other, also looked interesting at this stage for the way in which it opened up the question of relationship. It allowed for exciting work about how power relations between men and women were rendered metaphorical or allegorical in visual imagery. Scholars had always understood the contrast between Roman soldiers and their barbarian enemies on sarcophagi and state reliefs as constructing fundamental ideals of Romanness through difference, through rendering Others as such (Alston 1998; Zanker 2000; Dillon 2006). The creation not only of distinctive manliness and womanliness but of Romanness or humanness itself emerged from an analysis of such binary systems. In the process of exploring the way in which these opposing categories gave form to Roman thinking, the constructedness of gender became ever clearer.

In part because of the growth of interest in this broader theoretical frame, scholarship in Roman art rapidly incorporated questions of a new sort. To some degree these questions depend on the fragmentation of the structuralist binary system, a fragmentation that permitted notions of multiplicity, both of categories and of readings, to enter the analysis. Rather than a reading, for example, of the radical alterity of Medea in the House of the Tragic Lovers in Pompeii ([Figure 4.6](#)), Bettina Bergmann (1996) combined Medea's image with that of her

partners in the same room, Phaedra and Helen, to ask how all three communicated a woman's situation that was also the human dilemma of decision. Each woman is, indeed, Other in her story: the dangerous foreigner, the step-mother, the tempted wife. Yet a more complex reading allows Bergmann to go further, to see how the decisions of each woman hang by a thread as all three create both an unbearable suspense for the viewer and a clear connection between this Other and the viewer. The structuralist system of analysis is here productively replaced by a rich form of analysis incorporating the complexity of human psychology and the potential for kinesthetic empathy in the viewer.





Figure 4.6 Medea before the murder of her children. Fresco from the House of the Tragic Lovers, Pompeii. Naples, National Archaeological Museum, inv. 8977.

Photo: Olivierw/Wikimedia Commons.

An enriched sense of the roles of the imperial women in the visual field also emerged out of the shift toward theories of social construction, because one could move from “real” empresses, for example, to empresses as more complex figures, embodied signifiers of ideological and political positions and, at the same time, people with major importance within the political system and capable of influencing its course, if not its structure. Whereas studies of the imperial women had long tended to remain at the level of catalogues, emphasizing style, dating, and identification, they have recently asked such questions as why an empress looks the way she does at different periods in her life, whom she resembles, and whether her images establish replicable traditions and for whom (Bartman 1999; Wood 1999; Alexandridis 2004). All of these questions can obviously generate insights into the workings of the changing politics of a period, and the work of Wood (1999) and Ginsburg (2006) on the portraits of Agrippina the Younger and the Elder joins with the insights of Fittschen (1982) and other portrait specialists in providing an excellent case study.

The meaning of sameness and seriality in female statue types and portrait statues has been discussed for women outside the court as well as within, and its ideological motivations in maintaining gender-appropriate decorum and modesty are coming into clearer focus (Trimble 2000; Fejfer 2008). The reproduction of images of personifications who stand in for the imperial women, seen for example in Fittschen’s study (1982) of the coins of Faustina the

Younger in the guise of the constantly nurturing Pietas or Fecunditas, can be seen as a way to convey not only the empress's own childbearing, worthy of equally endless compliments, but the universalizability of childbearing as a Roman virtue. To some extent this may be like the seriality of place personifications, where the differentiation of hair and costumes within the frame of replicable bodies and backgrounds makes ideological claims about the nature of empire and of the land itself (Smith 1988; Ostrowski 1996).

Questions about the ideological functions of women's images within given genres (public versus funerary statuary, for example) and contexts (the court or the provincial town, the theater or the sanctuary) seek to embed representations of women within an artistic and social context (one that includes men) rather than isolating them as a separable intellectual category (Kampen 1981). A great source of examples comes from the realm of group portraiture, whether of non-imperial or imperial men and women (Rose 1997; Fejfer 2008). Although one would love to know who the male and female members of the Cartoceto bronze statue group, dated to the 40s BCE, are and where they once stood (Stucchi 1988; Fossey 2009), they are hardly the only group of non-imperial statues to permit exploration of the relationships between men and women and between the two and their setting. The Julio-Claudian portraits of non-elite men and women found in a room in the sanctuary of Diana at Lake Nemi have received some study from the point of view of gender and relative rank ([Figure 4.7](#); Fejfer 2008: 285–305), whereas many of the imperial statue groups, such as the one from Naronia in Croatia (Marin 2001), beg for discussion from this perspective, since both groups allow us to think about why as well as how women's portraits are depicted in settings with those of men and what sorts of honors are conferred on each. These questions testify to the importance of thinking about women within the larger frame of gender politics whether in imperial or non-imperial contexts; we learn much about the art, but that in turn reveals much about historically specific attitudes and ideologies.



Figure 4.7 Reconstruction of a room in the sanctuary of Nemi with the statues of Fundilius and Fundilia. Reconstruction: © Jane Fejfer (drawing by Thora Fisker).

Interest in female patronage, ownership, or sponsorship of works of art from grand civic monuments to humble tombstones, from mirrors to houses, has extended our sense of women's public activities as well as their roles in domestic and familial contexts, although it has by no means answered questions about the quantity of patronage or the amount of women's autonomy in such activities (cf. Mukherji 2003). A few influential studies have opened up the issue of women as public benefactors at the imperial and the local level; one of the most interesting is still that of Plancia Magna of Perge and her city gate. Studied by Mary T. Boatwright (1991), this woman is particularly interesting because of the portrait statues and inscriptions honoring her (Figure 12.6) and, secondarily, her family and the imperial family. A larger study incorporating analysis of other architectural benefactions by women would benefit the field and would build not only on Boatwright's Plancia or the Eumachia Building in Pompeii or Regilla and Herodes' Nymphaeum at Olympia, but on the work of Riet van Bremen on women's benefactions more broadly (Bol 1984; van Bremen 1996; Tobin 1997; Pomeroy 2007). Who had the potential for benefactions, which men and women in which families in which cities, whether there were periods of changing preferences for women as for men in kinds of benefactions—all of these questions remain to be explored and in these settings, as in others such as portraiture or terracottas or mosaics, we can see the inseparability of gender from other social categories and the benefits of a relational approach. At the same time, all of these issues depend on a theory of gender that allows a focus on women rather than the renewed erasure of women under the sign of man as unmarked term.

Gender takes the study of women into new places not only because it puts women together with

men rather than separating out the study of their images. It opens up the possibility, in fact the necessity, of seeing men and women both as existing inside complex systems of social variables including age, geographical and temporal placement, social position both in the family and in the larger society, and sexuality. Gender is one among these variables and shapes the way in which the others produce meaning just as they shape it. This guarantees a strong interdisciplinary concern that manifests itself vividly in the presence of classical archaeologists and art historians in conferences and anthologies alongside philologists, historians, and literary scholars of antiquity (e.g., Harich-Schwarzbauer, Späth, and Hindermann 2005; Sojc 2005; Hartmann, Hartmann, and Pietzner 2007; gender conferences sponsored by Arachne, the Scandinavian gender and antiquity group, e.g., Lovén and Strömberg 2003 and 2007). The conversation between material and textual culture enhances the possibilities for interesting and useful debate about the forms that gender takes, not only in relation to other social variables but also to the media in which it is represented and articulated.

Gender and Sexuality

By offering “gender and sexuality” as a single phrase, this chapter puts forth a specific theoretical position (Butler 1990; Najmabadi 2005). The visual world of Romans had particular although highly localized and differentiated forms, which depended in some measure on assumptions about men and women, about how they should be as well as what they should be and what they should do. These assumptions are inextricable from assumptions about what constitutes sexuality, how it looks and is lived in practice, and what kind of metaphorical work it can do in relation to and in opposition to notions of gender. As a “naturalistic” art, one rooted in the representation of male and female bodies and the spaces in which they operate, Roman art always had an explicitly gendered visual language as well as gendered practitioners and consumers, even if these are only recently visible to the modern commentator. However, by reconceptualizing the term “representation” to show that it designates a social practice rather than a purely artistic reflection of society, one can see that representation means the duplication of a “real” body possessed of a “real” sex or of one that has “real sex” and a “real” sexual identity. Rather, it means the repeated presentation of a visual and kinesthetic discourse about people and their attributes where neither is a stable given (Butler 1996; Kampen 1996b). The visual discourse is not only shaped by its social frames and contexts; it is itself a social frame shaping what can be thought about people and bodies and sexes.

Two ways of thinking about sexuality emerge from this notion of visual-kinesthetic discourse: the representation of sexuality and the sexuality of a viewer. However, sexuality itself is a fraught concept here, since over the past 30 years a debate has gone on concerning the term and how it should be used in pre-modern society. Building on Foucault, a number of Anglophone and French scholars published a collection of essays entitled *Before Sexuality*, the dominant argument of which distinguished between modern sexuality and the pre-modern sexuality of the Greco-Roman world (Halperin, Winkler, and Zeitlin 1990). On the modern side, sexuality was seen as a matter of identities, built on object choice, and characterized by attributes or

behavior patterns that were seen in some cases as inherited and in some cases as acquired, whereas on the pre-modern it consisted of behaviors and practices but not of identities as such. Object choice did not determine one's identity; instead, the position in a sexual power relationship did. Thus, in this argument, a proper adult man might well be the sexual penetrator of a female adult or child or a male child or youth; he might have a wife and children and a boy slave lover and a freedwoman or slave mistress; but there would be no particular questions about his sexual identity. Practices, not identities, were what mattered and made Roman sexuality unlike that of the modern world.

A number of problems have emerged as this point has come under scrutiny, particularly in relation to homoerotic behavior. The *cinaedus*, the adult man who chooses to be sexually penetrated by other men, has been discussed as having not only a set of practices but an identity and even a social niche in the Roman world (Richlin 1993). Literary texts, mainly invective and satire but also physiognomic texts, suggest that the passive role and the object choice of other adult men might go along with forms of bodily self-presentation that were recognizable as feminized, but that they need not. The man who was too rough and hairy could be just as problematic in terms of his sexual identifiability as a woman might be when she seemed perfectly "normal" in her manner and dress, but was discovered to have only female lovers (Gleason 1995). The man who was too feminine or too masculine could be a *cinaedus*, and the woman who was perfectly ordinary could be having sex with other women as easily as the hyper-masculine woman who boxed, drank, and swore. On one level, the too masculine and the too feminine, reversing proper order to a degree considered extreme, disturbed the writers who were engaged in constructing a vision of what was or was not normative. The excessive is often at the root of discursive distress. On another level, that which refused to make itself visible, that which could not be discerned by the experienced eye, carried its own disruptive effects for the viewer, since one might be shown to be wrong about what one thought someone else did (and perhaps was).

The question of how these debates, so grounded in texts, operate in the visual arts has only begun to be discussed with any seriousness, since until recently most work on art and sexuality had remained anchored to the ubiquitous coffee-table books about "erotic" art (Clarke 1998). The increasing attention to the subject has not, as yet, clarified the question of whether Roman sexualities were inherently unlike those of the modern world, although several authors have argued in favor of this position (Clarke 1998). We rarely have any images that make sexualities obvious other than those of men and women, young and usually idealized, engaged either in yearning for one another or in copulation. Almost all of the images are heteronormative, although they seem not to show the use of the "missionary" position; display of bodies and acts is what counts, and poses that reveal these are chosen for paintings and sculpture. Of the rare examples where sexual behavior does not conform to this type, one can find a few cases of men and boys having sex, sometimes with a servant peeking, and there is a well-known set of wall paintings from the Suburban Baths of Pompeii in which multiple participants and non-normative practices are depicted (Jacobelli 1995; Clarke 1998; Pollini 1999). Ithyphallic or masturbating male figures, hermaphrodites, and mythological characters with seriously wrong object choices from Pasiphae to Narcissus ([Figure 4.3](#)) expand the field of exceptions, but

these are ultimately unusual in the mass of heterosexual couple images on lamps, silver, wall paintings, graffiti, and small terracottas ([Figure 4.8](#)). This kind of repetitive conduct, along with the scenes of flirtation (as at the Farnesina paintings), or images, often mythological, showing yearning figures such as Polyphemus with Galatea, Apollo and Daphne, or Selene and Endymion, or those depicting lost loves such as Pyramis and Thisbe or Hero and Leander, gives us a dominant heteronormativity in the visual realm (on repetition, see later discussion).



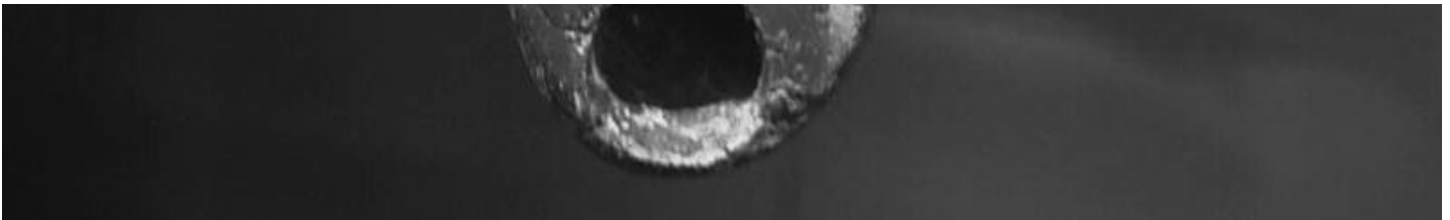


Figure 4.8 Heterosexual couple on a Roman lamp, Cologne, Römisch-Germanisches Museum.

Photo: Marcus Cyron/Wikimedia Commons.

Since a respectable married woman was expected to be chaste and sexually responsive only to her husband, and presumably mainly in the interest of enhancing her chances of producing children, she was seldom the subject of any Roman discussion about her sexuality. This dictum excepts such works as Ovid's *Art of Love* and lost sex manuals directed to women, since these make it clear (seriously or not) that they are not intended for such ladies. The occasional comment that women were more sexually responsive than men said nothing about the circumstances or whether this conferred any sense of identity on a woman. Nor does it help us to open up the question of how different kinds of viewers responded to scenes of sexual activity or to images of different kinds of bodies. Did all women respond as Livia is said to have done when confronted by a group of naked male prisoners (Dio Cassius 58.2.5)? Reassuring the apologetic officials, the empress commented that these meant no more to her than statues. Or did some women gaze on the images of gladiators, said to be erotic objects even for high-born women such as Eppia, the wife of a senator (Juvenal, *Satire* 6), or the pictures of love-making in their houses and experience sexual desire? The written sources say nothing and, in themselves, neither do the objects and images; they were there to be seen, but we do not know if, when, and how they were looked at by women or, for that matter, by children, by slaves or visitors, or by men with varied desires. Only in the increasingly sophisticated work on paintings and mosaics in houses by such scholars as Bergmann (Bergmann and Victoria 1994, Bergmann 2002) or Susanne Muth (1998) and in exploratory work on the houses themselves by Penelope Allison (1997), Michele George (1997), Lisa Nevett (1997), and Andrew Wallace-Hadrill (1988) are these questions being addressed through the exploration of how people moved through and within rooms and engaged in temporally as well as socially conditioned looking.

In her work on the erotically charged statues of "sexy boys," Elizabeth Bartman (2002) has shown how these images might well have been objects of multiple desires for both men and women ([Figures 1.1](#) and [4.9](#)). Decorating domestic spaces or baths, they provide the languorous and curving poses and features of a youth dreamily awaiting someone's call. He appears ready to oblige. The contrast with the bodies of adult men in portraiture is clear, but so too with those of boys meant to be honored by the images, since their poses are never so sinuous nor their gazes so averted (Hallett 2005). Only some of the portraits of Antinoos, discussed earlier, share this kind of expression ([Figure 4.4](#)), and his body type is normally more mature, thicker, and more richly fleshy, so that he seems to share some of the imagery of the sexy boys but yet to stand somewhat apart from them. The adult male, whether clothed or nude, carries himself differently, and his body is modeled on statue types representing either

mature heroes or adult gods such as Jupiter or Mars (Wrede 1981, cf. [Figure 1.5](#)). The Bacchic boy, the Apollo poses, the Eros type are all restricted to portraits of children or to the sexy boys. These body types express not only desirability, but the lack of adult male power that could render such desire acceptable both for adult men and for women.

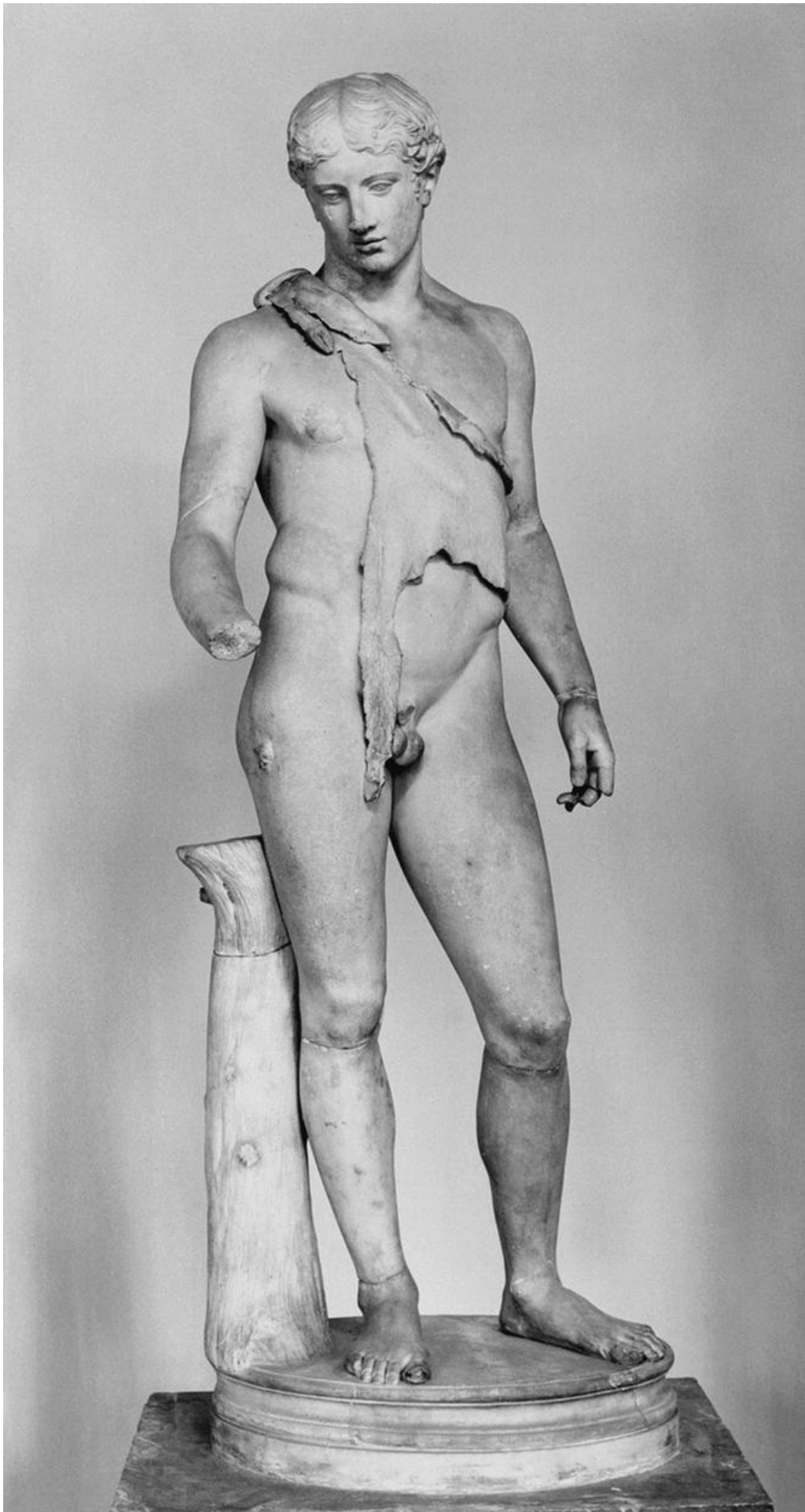


Figure 4.9 Erotically charged statue of Dionysus/Bacchus. Rome, Museo Nazionale delle Terme inv. 622.

Photo: Rossa, Neg. D-DAI-ROM-76.2000.

The desirability of the adult male and female bodies when they appear in portraiture has been little discussed, despite its raising important questions about whether Roman viewers distinguished among genres and sculptural contexts where sexual desire could be experienced consciously. The public statue of the emperor as a semi-nude divine type or as a heroic figure in a form-fitting cuirass seems as open to such readings as honorific statues of women whose drapery both obscures and clings to the body (Vout 2007; Fejfer 2008; Dillon 2010). Likewise, the togate bodies of men who were elite or aspiring to this rank use the thick layers of fabric to insist not only on rank, but on inviolability through a kind of massive invisibility of the body. The heavily draped bodies of men and women thus suggest that the masking of the body is designed not so much to disallow desirability as to maintain control of the body, including visual control, for the owner of that body. Given that public portraiture was, by definition, honorific and thus implied the denial of visual (and other kinds of) penetrability of the body, the drapery assures that control is maintained (Walters 1997; Fredrick 2002). The recent analysis of the few public statue types generally used for honorific images of women (by comparison with those of men), wrapped closely in their garments and neutral in facial types and expressions, suggests that precisely this tendency to repetitive uniformity is what protects both the body from penetrating view and the woman's status from an excess of publicness; it keeps her from standing out and thus violating her position as *matrona*, private and domestic in ideological terms (Trimble 2000; Dillon 2010). Yet the viewer may be like Tarquin gazing with lust on the virtuous Lucretia (Livy, *ab Urbe condita* 1.57–59), and the statue tells us nothing about that. Just as Pseudo-Lucian (*Erotes*) makes it clear that some viewers, seeing the statue of Aphrodite at Knidos, may lust for her from the front and thus for the view of her as a woman, and others may desire her from the back because she resembles the youth the viewer wants, others such as the author himself may stand aloof and amused, but the images themselves will only rarely let us know which is which.

A Few Remarks on Representation

If one issue is more central to gender studies than any other, it is power. That works of art can represent power relations is only one aspect of the issue, since they can also become participants in power relations as they make them visible in very particular ways. Given that both gender relations and sexual relationships are power relations (as well as other things), an articulation of the ways in which these take material forms in art and architecture, as well as in functional objects of daily use and spatial relations within and outside of urban frames, is crucial to making all of those relationships clear. Whether we think about a Roman considering a statue as the object of his gaze or instead suspecting that it was capturing his gaze through its ability to attract, even in a thoroughly physical and magnetic way, or we consider the more obvious matter of the relative heights of figures on public monuments such as triumphal arches,

we are forced to deal with power (Gregory 1994). So too, when gender is at issue, the visual realm becomes an arena of power relations, since the viewer may see and accept as well as see and resist; may misinterpret and reinterpret; may be, to use Althusser's term, interpellated, hailed into being by the kinesthetic as well as the visual allure of what is seen (Althusser 1971). Here Judith Butler's notion of performativity for both gender and sexuality is important enough for the art historian to explore the role of the visual as a form of performance (Butler 1996). Performance in its largest sense, including making and looking at things, helps to make gender relations and to unmake them. The repetition of bodily movement or clothing combines with the repetitive placement of the body in certain spaces and in relation to certain objects, and those objects provide models for pose and movement and act as parallel repeated performances of gender and sexuality. Whether one is looking at or touching, holding or paying for an object or a monument, living with it or briefly visiting it, it makes the visual and physical frame within which bodily performances take place, and permits or constrains, forbids or mocks specific forms of performance. Thus, the sexy boy statue is not simply alluring to a viewer, it creates the circumstances within which the viewer becomes the lover and the beloved as well. That viewer can become both the performer and the one who resists the performance, the perfecter of repetition as well as the transformer. Instability is always inherent in viewing, which is always generating the instability in gender and sexuality (Kampen 1996b).

To explore notions of representation and power and their consequences for representation's gendered forms and participants is to rethink the fundamental corpora of Roman art rather than to dispense with them. The great studies of sarcophagi or building types, of carved gems, or Pompeian painting form the groundwork for the interpretive exploration of gender and sexuality, and they can only be enhanced and rendered more current as a result of such efforts. However, that enhancement depends, as has been suggested earlier, not on a simple compensatory effort: finding the women, for example, or talking about the male body, or discussing same-sex practices. It requires a new self-awareness on the part of the scholar, who brings with her or him a set of assumptions about how art history works and to what ends. Such self-awareness then requires the formation of some new categories and questions coming out of the conversation that archaeologists and historians of Roman art need to have with theoreticians of gender and sexuality, and with those historians and students of the visual worlds of other periods and places whose work has opened up such questions. One might name only a handful of examples, from the pioneer in the field of Western European art history Linda Nochlin (1988), working on nineteenth-century French art, to the late pioneer in Japanese art history Chino Kaori (2003: on gender in Heian Japanese art), or from Tapati Guha-Thakurta (2004: on modernism as a gendered phenomenon in India) to Afsaneh Najmabadi (2005: on Qajar sexuality in the visual realm), to find a world of fascinating questions and theoretical models. Some may end up being the wrong ones to use for Roman art or antiquity more broadly, anachronistic or simply impossible to answer because of the state of our evidence, but others spur our thinking both about our theoretical and methodological tools and about the nature of our evidence.

That the fields of classical archaeology and art history have been slow to explore these

conversations with all their potential comes as much from the empiricist traditions of the field (combined of course with lacunose data) as from the burden borne by all who work on what is in a sense an “area study.” We need to know about the visual realm, but in order to do our empirical work well we also need to be at home with the studies of historians and specialists in ancient literature, with epigraphical and numismatic techniques, and with a world of archaeology in which new material continues to appear at a rapid rate. For the historian of Roman art, the complexities of a gigantic imperial terrain and of a thousand-year history, of dozens of materials and genres, and of the continued existence of old but unanswered questions about the relationship between art and empire, art and ideology, art and desire, art and daily life, make the exploration of other fields and of theoretical models a complicated, challenging, but invigorating project.

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

General background on Roman women can be found in Fantham et al. (1994) and D’Ambra (2007). Natalie Kampen has written several papers on gender theory in Roman art, the most complete of which (Kampen 1996a) is in need of updating; the reader should consult James and Dillon (2012) for just such an update.

The literature on specific topics such as women and war (Zanker 2000; Dillon 2006), work imagery (Kampen 1981; Langner 2001; Lovén 2001), or gender in the Augustan period (Kleiner 1978; Milnor 2005) is extremely rich, whereas other areas tend to be understudied. Work on imperial portraits of women, especially those that explore the relationship of iconography to political issues, has produced new and deeper understanding of the workings of gender as an ideological instrument (Fittschen 1982; Bartman 1999; Alexandridis 2010; Trimble 2011), and discussions of wall painting have opened up the field to theories of the gaze (Elsner 1996; Valladares 2005).

Architecture is among the least explored of areas in terms of gender in Roman art (exceptions include Favro 1992; Kellum 1996), despite important initial explorations by historians of patronage (e.g., Flory 1984; Boatwright 1991), although there is more work on domestic architecture than public buildings (e.g., Allison 1997; George 1997; Nevett 1997). Another area in need of work is late antique art (Kampen 2009). Despite serious work by scholars of religion who include discussion of material culture (Brooten 1996; Castelli 2004), few art historians or archaeologists have as yet taken up the subject.

Sexuality, although perhaps less well theorized for Roman art than for other periods, has emerged as an important area. From the early work in Halperin et al. (1990), which focused largely on the Greek world, and the essays in Kampen (1996c), we now have more thorough studies such as Clarke (1998) or Vout (2007).

Finally, interesting discussion of women as scholars in classical art and archaeology can be found in Cohen and Joukowsky (2004), Nicotra (2004), and the online project *Breaking Ground: Women in Old World Archaeology* (http://www.brown.edu/Research/Breaking_Ground/about.php).

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† Deceased August 2012.

PART II

The Beginnings and End of Roman Art

CHAPTER 5

Republican Rome and Italic Art

Massimiliano Papini

Italy and Rome in the Republican Period (sixth to first centuries BCE)

Violent men, accustomed to hard work and absolute command, with the physique and mentality of peasants, bent on practical interests and advantages to be achieved at any cost: discussions about art and aesthetics were completely out of their horizon. This is the Romans' attitude toward art as sketched by Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli in 1965 (but we also seem to hear Plutarch describing the situation in Rome prior to 212. On Plutarch, see below; all dates are BCE). At the time, Bianchi Bandinelli lamented the absence of proper criteria to address the "problem" related to the history of Roman art, an absence due to multiple causes: the proverbial relegation of Roman art to a sphere subordinate to that of Greek art; the persistence of a generic concept of "decadence;" the delay in welcoming the efforts made by the School of Vienna at reevaluating Roman art and abandoning neo-classical aesthetics; finally, the objective difficulty of reducing a sporadic and multifaceted phenomenon to a logical (essentially historical) discourse. Furthermore, it was necessary to agree on when Roman art started and ended, a problem still existing today; how "Roman" Roman art was; and to what extent there was an artistic expression in the figurative vocabulary common in central Italy with a special, Roman emphasis.

The explosion of the debate about Etruscan-Italic art dates to the 1920s, in keeping with the demand of post-avant-garde movements to recover the indigenous roots of figurative traditions, considered to be endowed with "more blood, more flesh, more life than Greek life" (in the words of the French sculptor Emile-Antoine Bourdelle). This rediscovery led to the exaltation of the most genuine indigenous forces (predominantly visible in sculpture, even under the massive Hellenic influence), and subsequently to thoughts of ethnic character, dedicated to outlining a history of art in Italy (Siceliot, Etruscan, Roman) with geography as the unifying element. In Germany, Guido Kaschnitz von Weinberg (1926) chose portraiture in central Italy from the fourth century onwards as a testing ground for his structural methodology (*Strukturforschung*). This was an approach that postulated an exclusively Italic structure (not organic, as for example the Greek one), a collective will within an ethnic community powerful enough to form the single common denominator of individual creations. *Strukturforschung* sought the lasting existence of a constant, collective, and anonymous attitude innate to every artist in regard to form. In 1942, however, Bianchi Bandinelli freed artistic creation from racial prejudice and demolished currents of nationalist thought aimed at discovering in Italic art the roots of the future greatness of Rome. He recanted the nationalistic enthusiasms of the past, including his own. Anything but originality! On the contrary, Italic workshops were

sharing “expressionistic” and “impressionistic” styles, not without bite and freshness, but improvised in the absence of support from Greek forms. This verdict fed opinions biased toward a different direction, as that of Roberto Longhi on Etruscan artists. He considered them trivial and superficial, not educated enough to be at least mannered, and not uneducated enough to remain naively authentic.

Research on the art of the Republic from the 1970s onwards (reignited by Filippo Coarelli 1990a and b), and the acquisition of more systematic knowledge about different artifacts, have made it easier to identify the means through which Greek models were absorbed. Since the eighth century, central Italy and Rome came into contact with greater or lesser waves of “Hellenization”; their magnitude depended on the period and included variations of mediated as well as direct “Greekness” (e.g., trade and military conquests encouraged the circulation of sketch books, the import of objects, and the arrival of Greek artisans). The history of these contacts, however, is tortuous and not limited to artistic interaction. Interaction with a composite figurative heritage is only one aspect of the broader cultural dialogue with the Greek world, which involved the ruling classes but also wider social groups. From the fourth century onwards Italy was flocked by immigrants who were specialists in diverse occupations (barbers, hairdressers, cooks, teachers, doctors). Moreover, the acculturation process was not a blind imitation of a Mediterranean lingua franca; it was instead an active reception (selection, transmutation, revision, and sometimes resistance) and a reappropriation of its themes, its myths, and its forms, which adapted to the values and historical and social conditions of the receiving populations.

The refinement of research has also allowed another misunderstanding to be overcome. Bianchi Bandinelli (1965, 943) could still subscribe, while recognizing its simplistic character, to a verdict expressed ten years earlier by Hendrik Gerard Beyen (“In 200 there was no art in Rome, but it existed in 100,” 1954, 25). Beyen was convinced that from the age of Sulla onwards, paradoxically at the very time of the collapse of the Republican political structures, the foundations of Roman art as a distinct creative culture were in place. Current historical and archaeological criticism, however (esp. Hölscher 1978; Gruen 1992; Torelli 1997), focuses on political-cultural traditions and the Etruscan and Roman elites’ expression of their rank and rituals. Scholars explore that pivotal moment in the Middle Republican era (fourth–third centuries) in which a strong need for public self-representation, evident also in monumental scale and form, arose in the new urban ruling class that emerged from the integration of the *ordines*, the patrician–plebeian *nobilitas*. Finally, the previous periods (sixth and fifth centuries) were essentially restricted to Etruscologists as their exclusive field, a division that sometimes hinders the exchange of information with classical archaeologists.

Central Italy and Rome in the Sixth and Fifth centuries and the “Masters” of Veii

Let us return to our original question: Does “Roman art” in its formative phase (from the archaic period until at least the second century) have a quality unique to the city of Rome, or is

it insertable into—and indistinguishable from—the production of central Italy? No one doubts the greater cogency of the latter option. Moreover, does it make sense to quantify in individual central-Italic artifacts the percentage of formal elements originating in Greece, Etruria, Italy, or Magna Graecia? These terms trivialize the issue, especially since it is impossible to distinguish neatly the various strands and influences. Moreover, since the sixth century Rome welcomed artists and stimuli of various origins. This can be deduced also from the ancient literature, which, all in all, illustrates the situation most clearly.

The earliest references to artists working in Rome concern “foreigners.” They start with the three *fictores* (clay modelers), Eucheir, Diopos, and Eugrammos, and a painter, Ekphantos, who, in the mid-seventh century, accompanied Damaratos, a wealthy merchant exiled from Corinth and father of the future king, Tarquinius Priscus (Pliny, *Natural History* 35.152). More importantly, a certain Vulca, at the height of his career, was invited from Veii in the final phase of Tarquinius Priscus’ reign (582–578) to make the massive cult statue in the temple of the Capitoline Jupiter. (It was completed by Tarquinius Superbus and magistrates of the Republic; its imposing size and attribution to an architect originally from Ionia are still debated.) Vulca, the only Etruscan artist known from the literary record (others are known only through epigraphy), produced a “terracotta Hercules” (Pliny, *Natural History* 35.157), tentatively identified by Giovanni Colonna with the “Hercules” with covered head at the *Ara Maxima* in the Forum Boarium (Colonna 2008, 62). In the golden age of Etruscan hegemony, the Roman commission of an artist from Veii is far from surprising. Besides geographical proximity to Rome, Veii had long-established cultural relationships with the city (for example, Veii probably also adopted the cult of Aeneas as founder hero). Moreover, the excellence of Veii in clay modeling is confirmed by the discovery of the sanctuary of Portonaccio and its extraordinary acroterial and votive groups. These are attributed to several generations of sculptors called Vulca and, until the end of the sixth century, baptized using the rather dated term “Master” (Colonna 2008): Master of the great male nude, Master of the dignitary with sandals, Master of the group of S. Omobono. The latter is also credited (although not unanimously) with a well-known urban acroterium (from a building usually identified with the temple of Mater Matuta) featuring a group of Heracles and Athena from about 530. The choice of figures is perhaps due to an influence from Pisistratid Athens, which is also attested at Caere, Pyrgi, Veii, Satricum, and Caprifico di Torrecchia, places where it is likely connected with Etruscan and Latin rites of military victory and triumph, alluding to the idea of the heroic apotheosis of a *princeps* (first among equals). They are artifacts saturated with the Greek artistic tradition, in which the succession of various thematic, stylistic, and iconographic influences from the Ionic islands and coast of Asia Minor are tangible. These influences were transmitted partly through the arrival of artisans integrated as resident aliens in the communities, as is also evident in vase painting (especially at Caere: Bellelli 2012) and in tomb paintings at Tarquinia.

Some outstanding workmanship comes from the Master of Apollo, designer of the entire terracotta decoration of the Tuscan temple in the Portonaccio sanctuary. It is an architectural jewel erected in 510–500 on the initiative of some royal power, which is comparable to the most sophisticated monuments of archaic Greece, such as the Siphnian Treasury at Delphi. The

Portonaccio temple features a forest of statues on its roof, which function as acroteria and depict mythical episodes. The Apollo ([Figure 5.1](#)) so impressed art critics of the 1920s that in 1934 his head appeared in the manifesto of the Venice Biennale, created by the designer Marcello Nizzoli. It is with the Master of Apollo that we want to identify the sculptor from Veii, who, according to Festus (340–341 L), was commissioned by the Romans to make the acroterial chariots on the Capitoline temple. According to Plutarch (*Life of Publicola* 13.1), however, only Jupiter's chariot was assigned by Tarquinius Superbus to artisans from Veii, and was delivered in the first year of the Republic, 508. Finally, around 500 or shortly thereafter, the Master of Hercules and Minerva created a refined votive offering, the most Greek among Etruscan products of the late archaic period, which draws on both Ionic styles and Attic models.



Figure 5.1 Apollo from Veii, sanctuary of Portonaccio (510–500 BCE). Rome, Villa Giulia, inv. 40702-3.

Photo: Archivio Fotografico della Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici dell'Etruria Meridionale.

At that time or slightly later, in Rome, the modelers and painters Damophilos and Gorgasos, of Syracusan or Tarentine origin, decorated the temple of the “plebeian” triad on the Aventine, Ceres, Liber, and Libera. This temple is dated to 493 and linked to a cult officiated (not accidentally) according to Greek rites. According to Pliny (*Natural History* 35.154), a Greek metrical inscription in the temple stated that the works of Damophilos were on the right hand and those of Gorgasos on the left, and the antiquarian Varro stated that before the temple on the Aventine all temple decoration was Tuscan; that is, made by Etruscans. Damophilos and Gorgasos have also been linked with fragments from the area of the Gardens of Maecenas. They are attributed to an early fifth-century group functioning as (central?) acroterium, including an “Amazon.” The theme, style, and type of her armor point to the Greek world, while the technique, material, and use of color link her to Magna Graecia or Sicily (Lulof 2007). Additional evidence of the “Hellenization” of archaic Latium in the late sixth century is the change in direction of Latin inscriptions to right-directional, as is usual throughout the Greek world. This change is all the more significant because Etruscan inscriptions were by contrast left-directional.

Finally, on the Capitoline She-Wolf, dated to about 480, we can identify iconographic and stylistic similarities with Persian art, mediated of course by Ionian artistic culture (Giovanni Colonna and Eugenio La Rocca in Bartoloni 2010). A recent proposal dating it to the Middle Ages (by virtue of the technique used) is unlikely, as the bronze would remain isolated in that period given the absence of convincing comparable artifacts. This case is an example of how sometimes technical investigations (which must also be subjected to critical scrutiny) and formal analysis may be misleading. A third option, although still argued very cautiously, is that the wolf is a medieval copy of an Etruscan-Italic original, but that is not currently convincing as it seems rather compromising and conciliatory.

From the second quarter of the fifth century, after the naval defeat of Cumae (474) and simultaneous to the recovery of Greece from the Persian Wars, Etruria entered a century of an alleged “crisis” (an inappropriate term, however, because it is rather exaggerated and oversimplified). The “crisis” limited the possibilities for self-representation and the exhibition of wealth (even in the funerary sphere) and led to a “Spartan” situation due to the oligarchies’ grasp in the towns. The artistic culture of the so-called *Interimsperiode* (intermediary period) (470/450–350/330), flourishing chiefly in inner Etruria, embraced Greek “classic” achievements without rejecting either the previous late-archaic figurative models or the later Severe style. Archaic social and economic values were waning, but not the figurative ones, which were durable since they could be safeguarded partly for programmatic reasons. Because they display older formal features, the sculptural artifacts of this period sometimes confuse the modern critic, who is used to the parameter of “Greekness.” This mixture has led some to argue that Etruscan art is characterized by a fundamentally “anti-classical” attitude (in the 1930s, the notion of “anti-classical” was also variously invoked for Siceliot and Italic art).

Moreover, it often complicates the dating of these works, especially since comparisons with Greek works do not really help.

Similar dynamics have led critics to use the concept of “delay,” to explain the irregular assimilation of fifth-century models from Greece and Magna Graecia into the art of central Italy. The “delay” is explained by the binary “center–periphery,” with the latter in the role of an artistic backcountry doomed to accommodate belatedly the innovations of the first, which is identified with Greece or, more precisely, with Athens. Yet, generalizing the notion of “delay” in the sense of mere belatedness is misleading, since the classical models (to simplify: Polyclitean and Phidian) could also be adopted promptly, for example through the valley of Etruria. There, the process was encouraged by the vitality of the *emporion* of Spina ([Figure 5.2](#)), responsible (although not exclusively) for the massive import of Attic pottery. This pottery continued to circulate also in the Faliscan and Orvietan countryside beyond 474, while Athenian artisans arrived in Etruria, whether via Thurioi or not. Evidence of this is the case of a certain Metron/Metru who signed an Etruscan *kylix* (drinking cup) dated to 450–440 that was discovered in Populonia, but attributed to the production of Vulci (Colonna 2005, 1803–1804, pl. 4). It is also possible that the ostensible “delay” overshadows alternative processes identified by Tobias Dohrn (1982), namely a freer translation of the rhythms of Polyclitus’ works and certain persistence of expressive-stereometric and decorative trends, or resistance to them. For instance, the artist of the high relief featuring the Seven against Thebes on temple A at Pyrgi dated approximately to 470 (Colonna 1996) was only partially receptive of the Greek severe style. The classical style was primarily an expression of Athens and Attica, and, since its underpinning socio-political ideology was not transferable elsewhere, it could not spread at the same time throughout the Greek world.



Figure 5.2 Bronze statuette of a rider, from a sanctuary outside the city of Spina (c. 430 BCE). The Detroit Institute of Arts 46.260.

Photo: Detroit Institute of Arts, USA/City of Detroit Purchase/The Bridgeman Art Library.

Another factor in fifth-century central Italy that led to the intermittent absorption of innovations was the attenuation of public commissions. This development prevented artisans from elaborating and challenging each other through competition and emulation to extend their goals, as would have been possible in more demanding projects (patrons also competed with each other through challenging their commissioned artisans). Not even fifth-century Rome, sometimes called the period of the Roman “Middle Ages,” could boast a Parthenon, since there were no temples built between 484 and 431; that is, between the dedication of the temple of Castor and Pollux, whose terracotta decoration has been traced to a workshop in Caere (which in the archaic period excelled in clay modeling, as shown by the Sarcophagus of the Spouses among others), and the dedication of the temple of Apollo *in pratis flaminis*. Moreover, during the same (archaeologically elusive) period, there is no evidence in Rome of terracotta architectural decoration, while imports of Greek and Etruscan ceramics become rarer.

Things changed quickly with the emergence of aristocratic opulence at the end of the fifth and the first half of the fourth century, especially in the corridor between the Tiber and the Chiana valleys. Some of the most striking examples of the “classical” style of coroplastic art come from Orvieto, such as the late fifth-century terracotta heads in Via S. Leonardo (Dohrn 1982, 52, pl. 29). Their close adhesion to classical forms even suggests the availability of accurate models for drawing and mold casting. In Falerii Veteres, the oldest red-figure pottery (around 380) was influenced by the presence of (Attic?) Greek artisans, and the import of Attic red-figure vases. Again in Falerii, a complex erected in the same period (the urban temple of Scasato II) has yielded among others a clay bearded head, once considered a copy of the Phidian Zeus, but in reality more loosely connected to formal characteristics of the period around 430; there is also the bust of an alleged Juno, which evokes the drapery of Agorakritos’ Nemesis (Cristofani 1992, 41–43, pls. I, VI). Still from Falerii, among the terracotta decorations of the temple of Celle (c. 360) a headless female figure resembles Alkamenes’ cross-legged Aphrodite in the Gardens (Cristofani 1992, 43). The details of this figure are well attested in the Greek repertoire of the second half of the fifth century, such as the triangular form of the mantle folds at the front and the left arm pointing to the side. Finally, the bronze Chimaera of Arezzo, dated to the first half of the fourth century and attributed to a team of craftsmen, has been compared to the leonine clay bust from the workshop of Phidias at Olympia, which in turn was the model for the clay waterspouts from Metapontum and Caulonia (Maggiani 2009). As for Rome, the scarce documentation is somewhat balanced by the large clay sculpture known mainly from the oriental sanctuary of Lavinium. A late fifth-century statue of Minerva, which can provide an idea of contemporary cult statues, exhibits another mode of translation and simplification of Greek references (La Rocca 1990, 320, fig. 119): the body is flat, the face schematic, and the folds of the *chiton* consist of a regular, vaguely wavy fluting.

Arts and Crafts in Rome and Central Italy in the Fourth and Third Centuries

The oldest explicitly artistic work made in Rome, the Cista Ficoroni, was created just before the mid-fourth century. The Cista, a cylindrical container to keep feminine necessities, was discovered at Praeneste ([Figure 5.3](#); Coarelli 2011, 207–218, figs. 203–208, 210–211) and bears an inscription as guarantee of its high quality. This claims that the vessel was made in Rome by a certain Novios Plautios, not the engraver but the owner of the shop, at the commission of a Praenestine lady, Dindia Macolnia, who gave it to her daughter (the mobility of craftsmen was matched by the mobility of their clients). The style of the Cista is Praenestine (Praeneste was culturally and geographically close to Rome), but, based on his name, it seems that Novios Plautios was a Campanian client of a Tiburtine *gens* that entered the senate in 358.



Figure 5.3 Cista Ficoroni (second quarter of the fourth century BCE). Rome, Villa Giulia, inv. 24787.

Photo: Archivio Fotografico della Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici dell'Etruria Meridionale.

The high-quality Bulino-style engraving recalls motifs from Greek large-scale paintings, echoed also in the subject (an episode from the Argonautic myth), but also motifs from Italic ceramics, perhaps the intermediate model between the grand Greek originals and the workshop that produced the Cista Ficoroni. This is indeed unsurprising since Praeneste, besides importing Tarentine bronze objects such as helmets, caskets, and mirrors, was a conduit for spreading Italic models throughout the Tiber valley. Finally, the statuettes of Dionysos/Liber with *bulla* and satyrs on the handle of the lid reveal the popularity of Dionysiac subjects in central Italy, evident also in luxury furniture, mirrors, small altars, votive offerings, and ceramics. In the erroneous belief that the Cista was not artistically uniform, these figures were previously attributed to an Etruscan workshop; yet from the first half of the fourth century, Praenestine bronze-work (or rather bronze-work from Latium and Rome) converges with the contemporary production of north-eastern Etruria around Florence and Fiesole. From then on, influences would not only move from Etruria to Latium but in the opposite direction as well, since there were more workshops in Latium spreading late classical and proto-Hellenistic trends. In fact, their work opened new horizons, perhaps in the wake of Roman military campaigns (see later discussion). Roman expansionism would have acted as a unifying catalyst in the peninsula regarding culture and art (Bonamici 1991). In any event, while the Cista Ficoroni exemplifies the inadequacy of labels in a craft that is as homogenous as it is complex, it is not for that reason less “Roman.”

Various sources attest the name of Gaius Fabius Pictor, a Roman painter, who apparently belonged to the aristocratic *gens* of the Fabii despite the lowly reputation of painting. After him, painting was no longer practiced by people of rank (with some exceptions). In 304–303 Fabius Pictor painted a set of paintings for the temple of Salus on the Quirinal, dedicated by C. Iunius Bubulcus, victor of the Samnite wars. He proudly affixed his signature to the temple paintings, which were destroyed at the time of Claudius (Pliny, *Natural History* 35.19). A stimulating but ultimately unconvincing article by Renaud Robert (2002) argues that the tradition of Fabius Pictor’s pictorial activity must have resulted from a later interpretation of this *cognomen* of the Fabii and the alleged presence of an inscription related to a C. Fabius. For Robert, this Fabius was among the major characters in an episode of the Samnite wars, which may have been represented here.

In the second half of the fourth century, great qualitative and quantitative innovations in official art and in craftsmanship appear in Rome, due to the transformation of political and socio-economic structures. One such case is the Sabine conquest in 290, after which (according to Q. Fabius Pictor) “the Romans knew wealth for the first time” (*Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* 809 F 27). Indeed, the acquisition of large territories by the aristocracy added to Rome a previously unthinkable expanse of fertile land (c. 5,000 km²). That was the period of great Roman expansion, with victories over the Etruscans, the Latins, and the Samnites. These military conquests put Rome in direct contact with various geographical areas in the south and

with multiple cultural and artistic versions of Hellenism. For instance, the victory over Tarentum (272), a city for which archaeology does not confirm the irreversible collapse in production after its conquest that is commonly assumed, seems to have been one of the most important vehicles in transmitting Hellenistic models throughout Italy at least until the late third and early second centuries (Ambrosini 2010). During these conquests, army generals raised Roman self-awareness and advertised their contribution to the fortunes of their country through votive offerings, the dedication of temples (funded by the *manubiae* from 325 onwards), and honorary monuments. These were also the years when Rome became leader of Italy and began to adopt amenities suited to its new status: greater infrastructure for services and reorganization of public spaces such as the Forum (especially in the area of the *Comitium*). Now elevated to a scene of civic and political representation modeled after the Greek *agora*, the Forum gained in *dignitas* by replacing the butchers' shops with *tabernae argentariae* (bankers' shops). Yet, despite the label *hellenís pólis*, the Greeks, accustomed to the magnificent capitals of Hellenistic kingdoms, would not yet have conceded that Rome's appearance matched its power.

Besides being a city of consumption, Rome became also a production center, since the wealthy took the opportunity to dive into a promising market in Italy, as in ceramics. The workshops belonging to the group "*atelier des petites estampilles*," flourishing between the end of the fourth and the beginning of the third centuries with a wide circulation in central Italy and overseas, are attributed to Rome and other centers in Latium and Etruria (Panella 2010, 27–29). This is the case also with the *Genucilia* bowls (decorated with red figures and female heads of Italic influence), and with the (more narrowly distributed) *pocola deorum*. The latter are black-glazed cult vessels, sometimes with added polychrome decoration, bearing in Latin the name of a god followed by the word *pocolom*. They are painted in a concise style in accordance with the achievements of proto-Hellenistic painting or rather of Italic pottery, in particular of the *Gnathia* type. Most of the deities depicted seem to refer to cult centers attested in Rome (Cifarelli, Ambrosini, and Nonnis 2002–2003). Three examples exceptionally depict an elephant ([Figure 5.4](#)), a motif that, although perhaps related to the expedition of King Pyrrhus of Epirus in Italy and the opulent triumph of M. Curius Dentatus in 275, may also echo paintings made for Alexander the Great (Coarelli 2011, 230–232, fig. 228).



Figure 5.4 Plate from Capena, necropolis of Macchie, grave 233 (IV) (second quarter of the third century BC?). Rome, Museum of Villa Giulia, inv. 23949.

Photo: Archivio Fotografico della Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici dell'Etruria Meridionale.

Besides being a center of production, Rome assumed other roles. During the fourth and third centuries, a boom in Italic and Latin public religiosity intensified the practice of dedicating terracotta offerings in sanctuaries, votives consisting of statuettes and heads mostly made from molds. The spread of these votives was partly related to the growing political and economic influence of Rome through its colonies. In this case, Rome not only acted as a production site, but became an intermediary for the movement of artisans and the circulation of molds.

In any event, this was a golden age for the multifaceted craftsmanship in central Italy, generally of excellent quality even in its most common representations. There are, indeed, many

connections between these and more sophisticated artistic manifestations, because the crafts remained essentially alien to the needs of productivity and long-distance diffusion. This close relationship also allows us to reconstruct a figurative fabric out of which emerged the highest manifestations of official art (unfortunately rarely preserved). One example is the “Capitoline Brutus” ([Figure 5.5](#); Papini 2004, 72–94, figs. 16–24), a portrait almost unanimously dated to the late fourth century and probably part of one of many honorary statues that were made in Rome during those decades (see below). Whether its maker was Etruscan, Campanian, or Roman is still a matter of debate, yet comparisons with contemporary Greek works allow us to establish that the head was produced by a craftsman capably reproducing formulas of Greek portraits (of thinkers and orators), combined with independent solutions common in the central Italic figurative repertoire. For example, Brutus’ hair demonstrates a clear analogy with a roughly contemporaneous bronze bust from S. Giovanni Lipioni, a village 18 kilometers from Pietrabbondante (Papini 2004, 99–111, figs. 31–34), which perhaps originates from a sanctuary. It either represents a member of the local Samnite aristocracy emulating a Roman practice, or, less likely, a Roman, perhaps a victor of the Samnite wars.

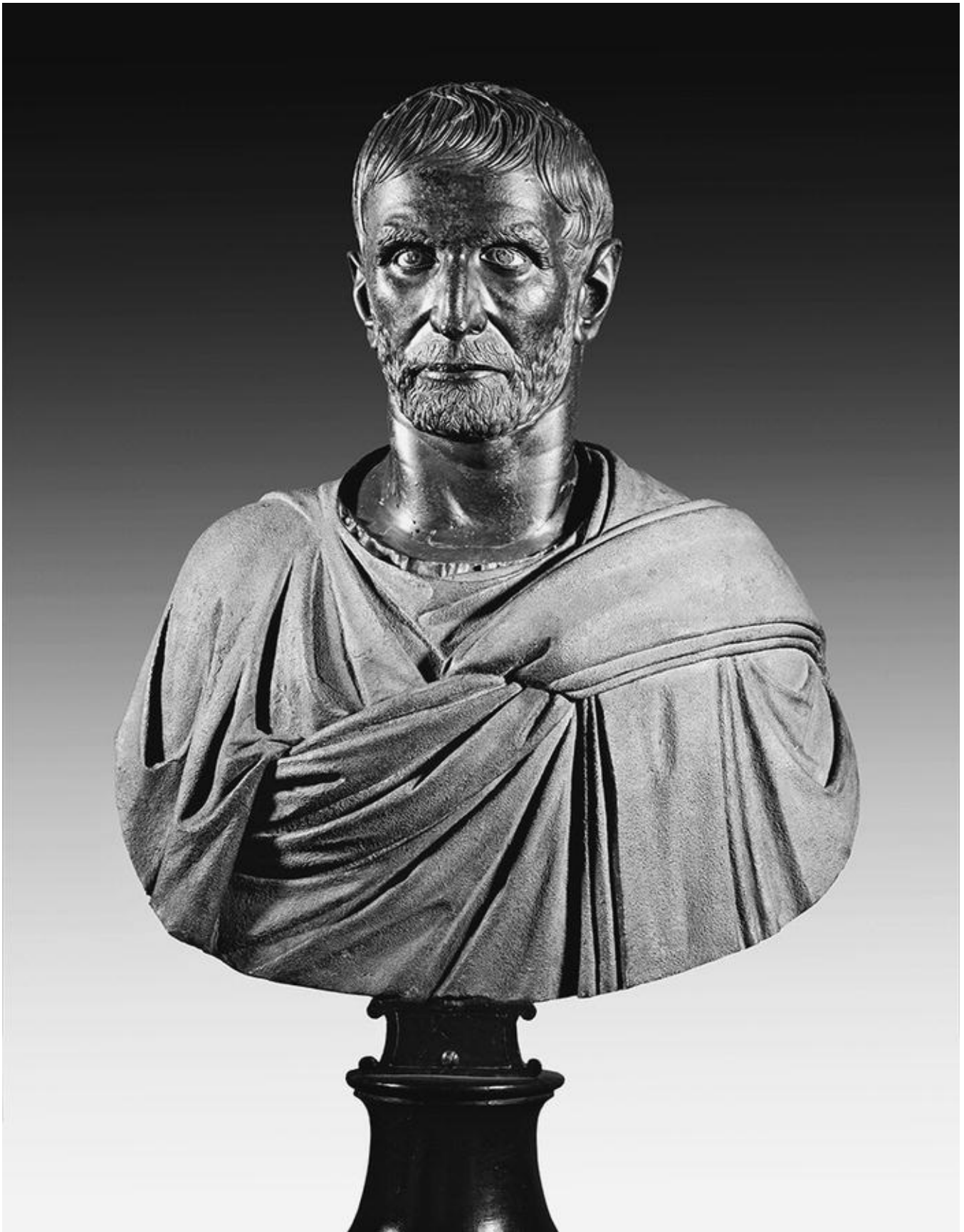


Figure 5.5 Capitoline Brutus (c. 300 BCE).

Rome, Capitoline Museums, Palazzo dei Conservatori, Sala dei Trionfi, inv. MC 1183/S. Photo: Archivio Fotografico dei Musei Capitolini.

In short, after the abovementioned transitional period, an alignment with Greek figurative art was again reached. This is confirmed by the votive terracotta production, with numerous *ex voto* objects that rework, simplify – and impoverish – the formal and typological motifs of Lysippus and Praxiteles; the more wealthy the individual dedicator, the higher the quality and adherence to Greek models. This is even truer for terracottas from temples such as those from the sanctuary of Scasato in Falerii Veteres and from the sanctuary of Magna Mater on the Palatine (La Rocca 1990, 321, figs. 122–124). Of course, painting did not lag behind. In a fragment from the *Roman Antiquities* (16.3.6), Dionysius of Halicarnassus expresses his appreciation of wall paintings characterized not only by very accurate contour lines, but also by a pleasing mixture of colors, and a florid style without “what was called tawdriness.” If we connect Dionysius’ assessment, although hypothetically, with the aforementioned work of Fabius Pictor in the temple of *Salus*, it would even suggest a “classical” appearance. In any event, the surviving examples, the famous fragment of a wall painting from a tomb on the Esquiline from the first half of the third century (Coarelli 2011, 156–160, figs. 141–142), executed in a technique “*a macchia*,” and the roughly contemporary paintings of the necropolis of Spinazzo at pre-Roman Poseidonia, all show figures with confident contour lines and document the acquisition of Greek techniques in their indication of lighting effects such as shadows behind objects on the walls (Pontrandolfo 1998). Further evidence of the mastery of the achievements of proto-Hellenistic Greek painting in central Italy comes from the late fourth to early third-century tombs of Tarquinia, such as the sarcophagus “of the Amazons” and the few painted vases ascribed to the Hesse Group (Torelli 2007).

For the Romans in the fourth and third centuries, figurative art was primarily one of the most advantageous instruments for the celebration of power and state religion, and at first sight its forms appear divorced from aesthetic enjoyment. For instance, the statue of Zeus, dedicated by Sp. Carvilius Maximus on the Capitoline in 293 after his victory over the Samnites, a statue so tall as to be visible from the sanctuary of Jupiter Latiaris on the Alban Mountains, was made of the breastplates, the greaves, and the helmets of the defeated enemies. Moreover, from the bronze filings left over, Carvilius made a statue of himself placed at the feet of the statue of Jupiter (Pliny, *Natural History* 34.43).

On the other hand, during the fourth and third centuries, certain types of Roman self-representation were also perfected, which were destined for a long fortune. The Roman people and their political elites engaged in the creation of a monumental legacy in public spaces through the dedication of buildings, temples, arches, war spoils, and honorary statues on the Capitol, in the Forum, and particularly in the area of the *Comitium*. These were the leading centers of rampant competition among members of the ruling class in their pursuit of *honores*, and of the exhibition of their *auctoritas* and *dignitas*. The impact of these monuments, which was increased year after year to illustrate the power of Rome (and the individuals that were making this power possible), grew during the spectacular triumphal or funeral processions that emphasized the associations between urban topography and the memory of the protagonists of past and present history. The present did not ever allow the oblivion of the past, because Roman society, in perpetual transformation, needed to be reassured by clinging to the exemplary behaviors set by the *mos maiorum*, the customs of the ancestors.

Hence the erection of honorary statues authorized by the senate and people. However, some can go back to a time earlier than the fourth century, according to the ancient texts: statues celebrating military victories by members of the patrician–plebeian *nobilitas* (e.g., the equestrian statues of L. Furius Camillus and C. Maenius in 338, and Q. Marcius Tremulus in 306); of other men worthy of their fatherland (e.g., the hero Horatius Cocles or the four ambassadors killed during a mission to Fidenae in 438); or the beginnings of Rome’s history (e.g., the Capitoline group of kings with the tyrannicide Brutus in their midst, the augur Attus Navius, or Hermodoros of Ephesus, the inspirer of the laws written by decemvirs). All of these “memorial figures” became models with which the whole community could identify and contributed to the construction of a public memory (Hölscher 1978). Even Pythagoras and Alcibiades received statues at the corners of the *Comitium* at an unspecified time during the Samnite wars, in response to an oracle of the Pythian Apollo that ordered the Romans to celebrate the bravest and wisest of the Greeks (Pliny, *Natural History* 34.26; *fortitudo* and *sapientia* were two key values of Roman society). These statues had to be based on Greek models, but they can only tentatively be attributed to an artist from Greece or, more likely, from Magna Graecia. Such an attribution is more certain for the statues erected in Rome by the inhabitants of Thurioi to honor C. Aelius (285) and C. Fabricius Luscinus (282) for the benefactions they had received from them (Pliny, *Natural History* 34.32). There are also the *triumphales tabulae* paraded in triumphal processions, panel paintings that were then placed inside temples or permanently displayed in public. In 264 M. Valerius Maximus Messala exhibited a *tabula* on a side wall of the Curia Hostilia, which represented his victory over the Carthaginians and Hieron II in Sicily. The occasion increased the *dignitas* of the painting (Pliny, *Natural History* 35.22) thanks to its display in a space the *dignitas* of which was also enhanced in turn, the Forum.

The same year (to speak symbolically and with approximation) saw a change in the relationship between Rome and Etruria, as Rome had become the center on which the Etruscan cities now depended. Indeed, M. Fulvius Flaccus, triumphator over Volsinii, erected a large votive offering in the sanctuary of Fortuna and Mater Matuta in the Forum Boarium near S. Omobono. Three bases (one circular and two rectangular) remain of this monument, two of which retain the footings of nearly 30 small statues. A certain Metrodorus of Scepsis, author of a first-century anti-Roman historiographic treatise, reproached the Romans for conquering Volsinii for the sake of 2,000 statues—in Volsinii the *Fanum Voltumnae*, the sanctuary common to the *nomen etruscum*, has recently been rediscovered. Although they probably did not depict exclusively deities, these statues must have adorned the sanctuaries of Volsinii (Pliny, *Natural History* 34.34). Was Metrodorus’ accusation influenced by the events from the end of the third century onwards?

The Sack of Syracuse (212) and the Age of Conquest: Rome and Greece in the Second Century

Both the ancient tradition and those modern critics who choose—questionably—to begin the narrative of Roman art in 212 (e.g., Zanker 2008/2010) identify the sack of Syracuse by M.

Claudius Marcellus in that year as a crucial moment in the increasingly radical “Hellenization” of Rome’s art and customs. Marcellus was responsible for the massive removal of statues (*signa*) and paintings (*tabulae*) from Syracuse to Rome for his *ovatio* (minor triumph). Syracuse was not an accidental choice, as it had long held a pivotal role between East and West in the reception of models developed in the courts of Macedonian, Asiatic, and Egyptian capitals. The sources disagree in their description of Marcellus’ act, since they are influenced by the individual agendas of historians and orators who negotiated the topic in ever-changing historical and cultural circumstances. For instance, in his *Life of Marcellus* (21) Plutarch presents his protagonist as a progressive leader and the embodiment of a successful reconciliation between *virtus* (bravery) and *paideia* (learnedness). Before the sack of Syracuse, Plutarch claims, Rome had looked rugged with weapons, bloody spoils, trophies, and memorials of triumphs. Marcellus embellished it with works created to please the eye, replete with Greek beauty (*hêdonê*), and charm (*charis*). This is the reason for the rumblings of conservative elders, who appreciated more Q. Fabius Maximus’ treatment of art: while confiscating city treasures during his second conquest of Tarentum (209), Fabius Maximus allegedly exclaimed, “Let us leave to the Tarantines their angry gods.” Of course, this famously cryptic saying is not to be taken literally: one of the spoils of Tarentum was a colossal bronze Hercules by Lysippus, which Fabius Maximus dedicated to the Capitol flanked by an equestrian statue of himself. Marcellus was criticized for having inundated a people by nature devoted to war and agriculture with leisure, conversations, and “chatter” about art and artists. Marcellus, however, was especially proud of having taught the Romans to appreciate and admire the beautiful works of the Greeks.

According to Polybius (9.10), the conquest of Syracuse was a strategic mistake, as looting artworks would ignite envy and hatred among the conquered people without contributing to a demonstration of power, which is essential, but better effected through pillaging gold and silver. Livy, however, dates to 212 the “beginning of our admiration of Greek art works” and the Roman “license” to despoil all buildings, sacred and profane alike. This license, Livy continues, finally reflected on the Roman gods and especially the double sanctuary near the Porta Capena, which was dedicated by Marcellus in 222 and adorned with war spoils. The sanctuary consisted of the twin temples of *Honos* and *Virtus*, abstract deities embodying key values in the Roman political vocabulary. The remarkable Syracusan *ornamenta* of these temples, which were visited by foreigners for their aesthetic excellence, had, however, largely disappeared by the time of Livy’s writing under Augustus (25.40.3).

While looted artworks had already arrived in Rome from the first half of the third century, their volume had never been so massive as to cause consternation. From the moment when every triumphator was practically obliged to outdo his predecessors in order to exalt his own success, ancient tradition coupled their names even with the introduction of particular fashions: Cornelius Scipio Asiagenus and Cn. Manlius Vulso are associated with engraved silverware, Attalid fabrics, and couches for triclinia; L. Mummius with Corinthian vases and paintings; Cn. Pompeius with pearls and precious stones. More spoils of war (artworks, treasures, and even libraries) followed in the second century, and intensified the debate about their appropriate use, their public and private display, and the pervasive display of statues of deities as furniture

in private homes. One aspect was the indispensable *publica magnificentia* (public splendor), another the *privata luxuria* (private luxury), which was as unacceptable in word as it was unstoppable in deed. The ruling class tried desperately but unsuccessfully to balance this equation. Some, like the famous censor of 184, M. Porcius Cato, criticized the subversive behavior of charismatic individuals (likened to Greek sovereigns), who were gradually undermining the traditional rules and delicate balances of the aristocracy.

Scholars have repeatedly pointed out that even the most ignorant and rugged Roman general (at least as represented by our sources, distorted by contemporary political propaganda), the *homo novus* L. Mummius, conqueror of Corinth in 146, was far from illiterate and did not despise art. He was well aware of the value of artworks as political tools for self-promotion, an idea familiar to Roman generals already in the third century. According to Pliny (*Natural History* 35.24), it was this Mummius who publicly endowed the foreign paintings with *auctoritas* when he exhibited a *tabula* portraying Dionysos (Liber) in the temple of Ceres, Liber, and Libera on the Aventine, which was painted by a certain Aristides, a Theban painter contemporary with Apelles. While the spoils of Corinth were being divided, Mummius had torn the painting from king Attalus II's hands, who had just bought it for an exorbitant amount, as he now suspected the true value of this picture that he had previously failed to understand.

Apart from the various degrees of openness to Greek culture on the part of the Roman victors and their modes of ostentation, the import of war spoils inevitably triggered an increasing penetration of Greek figurative and architectural language into Rome and Italy. Looted works and imported artifacts from the East and Greece were becoming increasingly attractive to prosperous patrons, either in Rome itself (now undergoing a rapid urbanization) or in peripheral Romanized communities. These communities also benefited from the distribution of looted art offered as gifts, as is illustrated by the *tituli Mummiiani*. Now “Romanization” and “Hellenization” proceeded hand in hand. Critical discretion is needed, however, because renowned patrons did not always feel a need for sophisticated artworks. This seems to be the case in the “Arieti tomb” on the Esquiline: it contained a fine ivory seat decoration with a Dionysian theme attributed to an Alexandrian workshop; and yet the triumphal procession with the triumphator in his chariot and attending figures was painted rather poorly on the external exedra ([Figure 5.6](#); Giatti 2007). Although it does not impede the readability of the subject, which does not require a sophisticated artistic language, this poor execution could also be symptomatic of the weakening of certain fields of craftsmanship. Such a decline is also suggested by the third- and second-century tomb paintings from Tarquinia, and certain terracotta votives, and was caused in part by the middle and lower classes' waning commissions.



Figure 5.6 Arieti Tomb from the necropolis on the Esquiline in Rome, including today's Via Napoleone III and Via Rattazzi (second century BCE). Rome, Musei Capitolini, Centrale Montemartini, inv. MC 2081/S.

Photo: Archivio Fotografico dei Musei Capitolini.

In the view of our moralistic sources, the victories in Asia Minor by L. Cornelius Scipio Asiagenus over Antiochus III in 189, and by Cn. Manlius Vulso over the Galatians in 187, coincided with the introduction of *luxuria Asiatica* (Asian luxury). Pliny (*Natural History* 33.148) claims that the Romans learned to admire and even love foreign opulence over the next 57 years, until 133 when Attalus III bequeathed his kingdom to Rome. Along with the arrival of *luxuria* and Asiatic artists, there was also a spread of Asiatic motifs such as Galatomachies (although they also occurred previously) and of the most dramatic Asiatic and Pergamene figurative models. This is clearly noticeable in stone statues such as the Peperino tuff sculptures from the Via Tiburtina, recently but unconvincingly restored as a single decorative complex and of quasi-mystical, funerary character (Talamo 2010); in terracotta temple decoration such as the frieze of Civitalba (Strazzulla 2010b); and in the cinerary urns from Volterra by the Masters of Oenomaus and of the Rape of Proserpina (Maggiani 2008–2009). It is thus not impossible that the Juno Cesi (Figure 5.7; Papini, 2010) was made at that time as a Roman commission. This work from the first half of the second century undoubtedly belongs to the artistic milieu of Asia Minor, as is also confirmed by the vertical neck support, a detail so far neglected but prominent in many first-century and imperial portraits and sculptures of this area. The famous mythical thiasos reliefs of the Altar of Cn. Domitius Ahenobarbus (made of

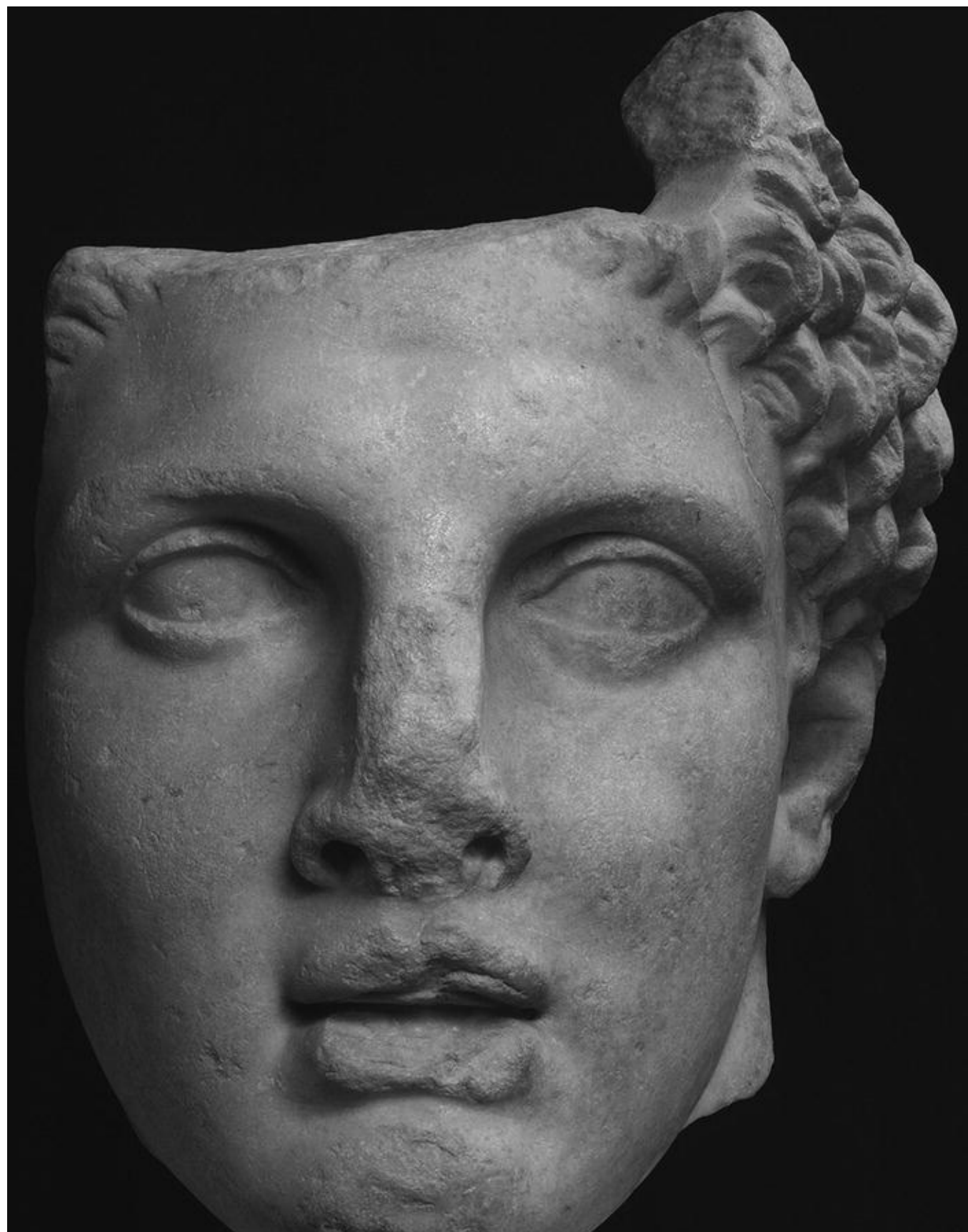
marble from Asia Minor; [Figure 10.1](#); cf. Holliday, [Chapter 10](#), this volume) have also been connected to war booty from the second half of the second century. The reliefs were adapted to a new Roman context and joined there with a relief showing a historical narrative (a scene of a censor's *lustrum*), and consequently with a quite different style and technique (Wünsche 2010). Recently, however, it has been claimed, although highly hypothetically, that L. Mummius had taken them from a famous sanctuary of Poseidon on the Isthmus of Corinth (Lippolis 2004, 53–76).



Figure 5.7 Juno Cesi (second quarter of the second century BCE). Rome, Museo Capitolino, Sala del Galata, inv. MC 731/S.

Photo: Archivio Fotografico dei Musei Capitolini.

Through several victories in the Greek world until 146, the pivotal year of the destruction of Corinth and Carthage, Rome participated in a process already started in the Hellenistic kingdoms that led to the revaluation of Greece and Athens as cultural centers. Significantly, after the victory of Pydna (168) and the capture of king Perseus of Macedon, L. Aemilius Paullus embarked on a tour of Greece. He also visited Athens, where he called for the renowned painter and philosopher Metrodorus as well as other Greek grammarians, sophists, orators, sculptors, painters, and experts in horse racing and hunting to represent his triumph in a dignified way and to educate his children (Pliny, *Natural History* 35.135; Plutarch, *Aemilius Paullus* 6.9). On the artistic level, Rome thus collaborated in a “classicizing” movement that was summed up in the lapidary Plinian *ars revixit* (*Natural History* 34.52, dating the revival to 156–153) and invaded the Mediterranean in the first half of the second century, mitigating the previous “baroque” exuberances. In a structured framework where Greek and Asiatic artisans were mutually influencing one another (and, inevitably, also local workshops), this trend is noticeable in the fragments of cult statues, mostly marble heads, especially by Athenian sculptors, such as the works by Timarchides, Polykles, and Dionysios, a family of sculptors working for Greek and Roman patrons ([Figure 5.8](#); La Rocca 1990, 427–428). It is also present in terracotta decoration of temples such as the pediment from the Via S. Gregorio (Di Cesare 2010); or the pediment of the Muses from the Civitella site in Chieti (Strazzulla 2010a, 93, fig. 12), which testifies to the fortunes of a subject also confirmed by cycles of muses transported to Rome by M. Fulvius Nobilior and L. Mummius, and by the marble group attributed to Philiskos of Rhodes made for the temple of Apollo *in Circo* (La Rocca 1990, 429–430).



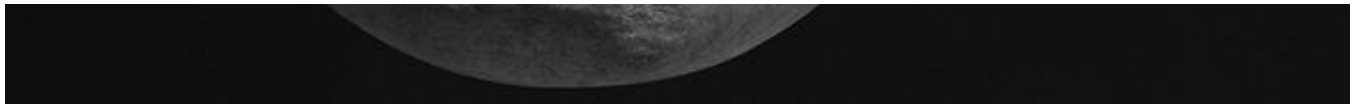


Figure 5.8 Colossal head of Hercules from the western slopes of the Capitol (after 146 BCE). Rome, Musei Capitolini, Centrale Montemartini, inv. MC 2381/S.

Photo: Archivio Fotografico dei Musei Capitolini.

Between all these statues in marble, bronze, and ivory from Greece and the East, what would the old terracotta statues have looked like? The opulent Syracusan artifacts are described as *infesta signa* (dangerous images) in a speech of 195 that Livy puts in the mouth of M. Porcius Cato (34.4.3–4). Cato expresses his irritation at those who praised the *ornamenta* of Corinth and Athens while scoffing at the humble architectural terracotta decorations of the Roman gods. Of course, the more luxurious materials held greater physical appeal, particularly as some of the oldest terracottas were decaying after many years of exposure. One of the terracotta chariots on the pediment of the temple of Jupiter, for instance, was replaced by a bronze *quadriga* as early as 295 through the intervention of the curule aediles Q. and Cn. Ogulnius (Livy 10.23.12). In the same temple, the cult statue of Jupiter Capitolinus by Vulca was replaced by another chryselephantine one after the fire of 83. In the temple of Ceres, Liber, and Libera, only the embossed work of the walls survived the fire of 31; it was cut out and enclosed in framed panels, while the statues adorning the pediments were lost (this is the most plausible way of understanding the description in Pliny, *Natural History* 35.154). Nevertheless, the Elder Pliny highlights the survival of terracotta decoration on the roofs of temples in Rome and in the lesser towns, praising their admirable execution, artistic merit, and durability, and he considers them more revered than golden ones, and “more innocent” (35.158). Interest in terracotta did not diminish in the late Republic and in the monuments of early Augustan Rome. According to the versatile artist Pasiteles, a native of Magna Graecia and active at the time of Pompey and Caesar, clay modeling was the mother of all plastic arts. Pasiteles was such a firm believer in this idea that he did not produce anything without first making a clay model (Pliny, *Natural History* 35.156). He also wrote five books on *nobilis opera* to guide the selection of sculptures worthy of being replicated, in response to the needs of a sophisticated audience of connoisseurs in a feverish market full of vendors, agents, counterfeiters, and buyers susceptible to follies.

Even though Plutarch’s account of Marcellus and the debate between progressivists and conservatives is a dramatized, after-the-fact reconstruction, certainly those who believed that the Romans would eventually be given to “chatter” about works of Greek art were correct. On the other hand, as Pliny asserts (*Natural History* 36.27), in order to admire art in a dignified way one had to view it in tranquility and at quiet places. Beyond the ever more luxurious spaces reserved for domestic *otium*, urban public spaces began to emerge in Rome in the second century to meet a need such as four-sided porticos (starting with the *porticus Octavia* of 167–165 and the *porticus Metelli* of 146–143), which enclosed temple buildings and provided for an adequate display of the booty. Thereafter, viewers could appreciate (in an almost modern way) a unique *tabula*, which was the product of a contest between Apelles and Protogenes. This *tabula* stood out among the other works of art as it looked like a blank canvas

and was painted only with barely visible lines by the two painters (Pliny, *Natural History* 35.83). It had ended up in Caesar's palace on the Palatine, attracted many visitors, and was more esteemed than any other masterpiece there.

We end with an underappreciated tale by Pliny the Elder (35.28). Augustus fixed two paintings on the walls of the Curia, one of which was perhaps a votive gift from a sanctuary and made by the late classical Athenian painter Philochares. This image was admirable for the familial resemblance between an old father and his teenage son. Over their heads, an eagle flew with a serpent in its claws. The image probably gestured toward the connection of Augustus with the deified Caesar, but thanks to that painter, from that time onwards and for many generations, the Senate would gaze at Glaucion and Aristippus, men of no importance in themselves. Such, Pliny concludes, is "the amazing power of (Greek!) art."

To conclude: there has been much progress in the study of art and crafts in central Italy and in Rome in the regal and Republican periods. What could be further research venues? Besides new findings, studies on individual groups of materials, and still missing works of synthesis (for instance a study on votive terracottas), in the near future there will probably be no new revolutions such as those of the 1970s. We will continue to use the most diverse methods (not just archaeological but also anthropological) for further improvements on our knowledge. However, because of the (correct) emphasis on the more or less intense waves of "Hellenization" that now involved the aristocratic elites, now larger groups in society, have we not neglected a little, and almost as an overreaction, those artistic currents from the late eighth to the first century that, for various reasons (the training of the artists, the nature and needs of their patrons, and their desired subject matter), were little or not at all affected by contact with works from Greece or Magna Graecia? These often end up in the vague domain of "Italic art." Without having to evoke the specter of "plebeian art," even "Hellenization" had its limits.

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

For Etruria and central Italy there are numerous fundamental studies by G. Colonna (synthesized in the 1994 compilation for the *Enciclopedia dell'Arte Antica*). On the Roman and Etruscan elites' expression of rank and rites and on functions of representative Roman art, see Torelli (1997) and Hölscher (1978; especially for the Middle Republic). A good introduction to the cultural and artistic relationships between Greece and central Italy from the eighth to the fourth centuries is Coarelli (2011). For the fourth to second centuries, see Coarelli (1990a and b), the extensive synthesis of La Rocca (1990), Zevi (2003), the various contributions in Zanker (1976), and those in the exhibition catalog edited by La Rocca and Parisi Presicce (2010), which also contains many illustrations. On the political and cultural transformations of the second and first centuries, see also Wallace-Hadrill (2008), and the review by Osborne and Vout (2010).

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CHAPTER 6

Adapting Greek Art

Rachel Kousser

The Romans came to power in a world dominated by Greek art. As their empire expanded throughout the western and eastern Mediterranean, they encountered a visual culture in which Greek forms, styles, and genres were pre-eminent; to these the Romans had access, together with an aesthetic tradition that had evolved over many centuries and that was, by the Hellenistic era, both extraordinarily flexible and of great expressive power. The Romans set about adapting it, pragmatically and selectively, for their own purposes, a process that can be analyzed in detail beginning in the second century BCE and that continued throughout the Empire.

This chapter examines that process of adaptation. It focuses on the questions of when, why, and how the Romans encountered Greek art; how they transformed it to suit their own needs and ideas; and how they moved away from it. I concentrate on three key periods: the second century BCE, when the Romans had their first substantial and direct exposure to Greek art; the Augustan era, when Hellenic forms, and especially classical styles, played a central role in the state-sponsored monuments of the new regime; and the Hadrianic-Antonine period, when to a greater extent than ever before, Greek types and styles were incorporated into the artistic *koinê* of the era and transmitted throughout the Empire. My argument is that the adaptation of Greek art was an ongoing process, driven by the social needs of the Romans, and occurring not only in the city of Rome itself, but throughout the vast expanse of Rome's territory.

Although the Roman adaptation of Greek art is a topic with broad implications, most scholarship on it has been narrowly focused. Debate has centered on questions of copying and originality, particularly in Roman sculpture. Beginning especially with Johann Joachim Winckelmann in the later eighteenth century, art historians have frequently identified many Roman sculptures as copies of Greek masterpieces, intentionally replicated due to their status as famous works of art (Furtwängler 1895; Winckelmann 1849–1873/1968). Even today, most handbooks of Greek art make extensive use of these “Roman copies” to illustrate lost works by celebrated sculptors such as Phidias and Polyclitus. However, some scholars have criticized “the modern copy myth,” and have suggested that many works identified as copies were instead new creations of the Roman era, albeit in historical styles (Marvin 2008, 120). This is likely true, but may not have mattered to Roman viewers as much as it does to us. Our modern value for originality—as well as the ready availability and low cost of mass-produced copies of famous works of art, for instance the Mona Lisa—has prejudiced us against Roman sculptural “copies.” Yet, these were high-quality, expensive monuments, commissioned by the elite and produced with intensive labor; they were also, clearly, valued by the Romans. The debate about copies and new creations thus seems to me ahistorical; it reflects modern concerns more than it does ancient realities.

Recently, scholars have broadened the debate, analyzing how Greek-style sculptures were used, and also considering questions of copying and originality in other artistic media, for example painting (Hallett 2005). This is the approach adopted for this chapter. In my view, what is most striking about Roman adaptations of Greek artworks is not so much the alterations to the monuments' *visual appearance*; indeed, many of these works were carefully fashioned to "look Greek," in order to highlight their connection to a revered tradition. Rather, it is the transformation of *context* that is most noteworthy, as Greek works were deployed to serve new Roman purposes; for example, Hellenic cult statue types were used to decorate baths, amphitheaters, and imperial fora, and grand triumphal monuments of Hellenistic rulers miniaturized to adorn private homes. A consideration of monuments within their original contexts is, in consequence, essential; only then will we see these Greek-style images as they were intended, as part of the rich visual culture of the Roman world.

A few words concerning the evidence for this topic are necessary here. Two sources of evidence are particularly significant: literary texts and archaeological remains. In terms of literary texts, it is important to note that the Romans never articulated in writing their approach to adapting Greek art. They did, however, comment extensively on an analogous subject: the adaptation and transformation of Greek texts in Latin literature (Hinds 1998). From these commentaries, it is clear that the Romans had a richer and more nuanced vocabulary concerning copying and originality than we do today. They did not denigrate copies and adaptations; rather, they saw such works as valuable due to their participation within a tradition stretching back centuries. Their literary comments suggest that the Romans would have appreciated the retrospective works examined here for precisely what modern scholars have found problematic about them: their self-conscious deployment of forms and styles taken from the repertoire of Greek art (Kousser 2008, 8–14). Such comments present a useful challenge to our modern critical sensibilities. They suggest that rather than proclaiming too insistently the "originality" of Greek-style Roman monuments, we should instead seek to appreciate them as the Romans did, as works deeply imbued with the power of the past.

With respect to archaeological remains, different problems arise, particularly concerning preservation. We are best informed about sculpture, since many Greek-style Roman statues were made of marble; sturdy and difficult to reuse, they have survived in great numbers. We know less about painting, an inherently more fragile medium and one preserved only in unusual circumstances (e.g., volcanic eruptions such as Pompeii, or burial underground). And for architecture, our view is perhaps skewed, since the most Greek-influenced parts of buildings—their marble columns and other ornamental details—have frequently been robbed out and reused, while their more Roman aspects (the unglamorous brick-faced concrete structures beneath) were left alone. It is consequently necessary to approach Roman monuments with a sensitivity toward what has been lost as well as what is preserved, in order to evaluate more accurately their connection to the legacy of Greece.

Initial Encounters: Greeks and Romans in the Second Century BCE

The Romans first encountered Greek art primarily through war. Early in their history, they established the largest manpower reserves and most effective fighting force in peninsular Italy; at the same time, their political structure, with a competitive military aristocracy, encouraged martial conquest and the extension of the empire. In consequence, the Romans of the fourth and third centuries BCE fought and won a series of wars against their neighbors, beginning with Etruscan tribes to the north and Greek cities to the south, and moving on to the conquest of Spain and the Carthaginian empire of North Africa, before turning their attention to the eastern Mediterranean. Subsequently, over the course of the second and first centuries BCE, the Romans fought, defeated, and looted the kingdoms of the major Hellenistic powers; they also extended their political governance to new territories: Macedonia in 167 BCE, southern Greece in 146, Pergamon (peacefully) in 133, the Seleucid kingdom of western Asia in 64, and Egypt—ruled by Greco-Macedonian monarchs for three centuries, and including the cultural capital of the Hellenistic Greek world, Alexandria—in 31.

These wars had important implications for the Roman encounter with Greek art. To begin with, they meant that large numbers of Romans, from generals to foot soldiers, became familiar with Greek material culture as they fought their way across the eastern Mediterranean. And those back home in Italy gained exposure as well, due to loot brought back and displayed in triumphal processions, in temples built *ex manubiis* (from the spoils of war), and on the walls of elite homes. In addition, the Romans' acquisition of the immensely rich territories of the former Hellenistic monarchies gave them the means, as well as the inclination, to acquire expensive Greek-style works of art; the luxurious new homes that they built during the second century BCE testify to the wealth that accrued from their conquests. Finally, as the Romans added Greek lands to their empire, they opened up new opportunities for cultural exchange. Italian traders and tax farmers moved east, where they frequently acquired a taste for Greek art; at the same time, many Hellenic artists traveled west to expanding Roman markets. The result was a transformation of Roman visual culture into something new, a world of images inspired by Greek art but expressive of Roman values.

Among these images, triumphal monuments in Rome were pre-eminent, due to their high cost, prominent placement, and celebrated commissioners. Indeed, the triumph itself played a key role in conditioning the Roman response to Greek art. It featured a successful general parading through the streets of Rome with his army and the spoils of war, cheered on by the urban populace. In consequence, Romans began to see the looted Hellenic artworks displayed in the triumph as valuable and desirable objects, whose possession was a source of pride for the Roman state. Triumphs were also significant in that they encouraged the viewing of Greek art in a decontextualized fashion, juxtaposing cult statues ripped from their temples with luxury dinner services far from the princely tables that they once adorned. Jumbled together and organized by medium or materials, the looted artworks were meant to be appreciated as objects for display, rather than as functional creations for a particular setting, as they had been in Greece. Triumphs thus encouraged the viewing of Greek monuments as isolated works of art; by divorcing the objects from their original contexts, they also allowed the Romans freedom to reinterpret and alter them in accordance with their own, purely Roman, cultural predispositions.

These alterations are particularly visible in manubial temples, which were commissioned by successful generals, set up along the triumphal route, and funded by the proceeds of war (Stamper 2005, 49–67). The temples were created in considerable numbers; as literary sources testify, at least 21 of them were dedicated between 200 BCE and 133 BCE alone. Often set up in fulfillment of a vow made on the eve of battle, they advertised the piety as well as the military prowess of their patrons, powerful members of the Roman ruling class. The temples thus served to commemorate martial victory, as is well demonstrated by the names of their presiding deities: Hercules Victor, Mars Invictus, Fortuna. They were solid and enduring memorials of war, permanent counterparts of the more ephemeral triumphs. As a successful general rode in his chariot along the triumphal route, the manubial temples decorated his path and connected his victories to earlier battles; they gave divine sanction to Roman military power and imperial rule.

Like the triumphs, the manubial temples were also prominent showcases for Greek art. Some featured looted Greek masterpieces: the portico surrounding the temple of Jupiter Stator, for example, was adorned with a group of statues now known as the Granikos Monument, which depicted Alexander the Great and his soldiers and was executed by the famous fourth-century BCE sculptor Lysippus (Velleius Paterculus 1.11.3–4; Pliny, *Natural History* 34.64). The portico was dedicated by Q. Caecilius Metellus, victor in Macedonia, c.146–143 BCE. Its sculptures had originally been set up at the religious center of Dion in northern Greece, where they were juxtaposed with other monuments celebrating the military and political achievements of the Macedonian royal family. In Rome, the temple sculptures testified instead to Metellus' Greek victories, and drew implicit analogies between his success and that of Alexander, the paradigmatic military leader of the Hellenistic world. In this way, the looted statues took on a new, thoroughly Roman significance, even though their context (a sanctuary dedication) was only slightly altered.

The architectural form of these sanctuaries was likewise a melding of Greek and Roman. Earlier Roman temples, influenced by those of Etruria, were squatly proportioned buildings with wide spreading roofs, terracotta decorations, and stairs and columns concentrated at the front. The new manubial sanctuaries departed from these prototypes with Greek-influenced details such as more upright proportions, exterior colonnades, and imported marble façades and sculptures ([Figure 6.1](#)). Over the course of the second century, they became increasingly lavish and Hellenic in character, as successful generals competed to erect the most up-to-date Greek-style monuments. Yet, although the inspiration was Greek, and the architects and craftsmen came likewise from the eastern Mediterranean, the new temples also retained some key Roman features. Despite their exterior colonnades, they remained oriented toward the front; they often had a “skin” of marble, but an interior of traditional Roman building materials such as tuff and travertine. And they generally kept their imposing high podia, instead of the more modest platforms characteristic of Greek temples.



Figure 6.1 Round temple in the Forum Boarium, Rome, Republican.

Photo: Pufacz/Wikimedia Commons.

In the second century BCE, temples like these were the central public medium for the display and adaptation of Greek art in Rome. Other key artistic genres remained resolutely traditional, or demonstrated their familiarity with Greek art primarily through their rejection of it: Republican portraits, for example, are unsparing depictions of older men with wrinkles, warts, and bald patches, as opposed to the suave and charismatic images of youthful Hellenistic rulers. Only in this way could the Romans assert their difference from the powerful and impressively cultured Greeks whose wealth and territories they coveted, and whose kings they sought to conquer; only thus could they highlight their ties to the past, in a society that prided itself on reverence for tradition. In public, therefore, the Romans remained adamantly Roman; Greek-influenced temples were acceptable only because their Hellenic aspects could be understood as references to military conquest and loot, rather than cultural emulation.

The private space of the Roman villa was very different. By the end of the third century BCE, elite Roman military leaders had already begun to decorate their homes with spoils from their victorious campaigns; in this way they could remind visitors of their martial accomplishments while also enjoying the attractively fashioned productions of Greek artists. Over time, their tastes spread, and Greek-style objects were manufactured specifically for the Italian market; they were embraced not only by the political elite of Rome, but also by wealthy landowners and businessmen throughout Italy. These patrons had eclectic tastes and a broad appreciation for Greek-style artworks, including not only statues but paintings, mosaics, jewelry, tableware, furniture, and garden ornaments. And they deployed these objects to decorate their increasingly luxurious, Greek-style homes, which featured colonnaded interior courtyards, elaborate dining rooms, and belvederes carefully positioned to direct the viewer's attention out to the lovely Italian countryside. While the urban townhouses of the metropolitan elite remained austere, ever more lavish country villas were constructed throughout the second century BCE. In them, wealthy landowners enjoyed the pleasurable leisure summed up by the Latin word *otium*, and generated by an elegant Hellenic ambiance (Zanker 1998b, 135–203).

While Romans of the second century BCE had broad-ranging tastes in Greek-style art, in their homes they preferred above all to emulate the palaces of Hellenistic kings. In the House of the Faun in Pompeii, we have a well-excavated example of this practice, in a building dating to the early second century and preserved due to the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE ([Figure 6.2](#); Cohen 1997, 176–182). Here the owner constructed two immense colonnaded courtyards, which were very similar to those of Hellenistic palaces at Vergina and Pergamon. He also adorned a particularly elegant room between the courtyards with a complex, technically brilliant floor mosaic depicting Alexander the Great and the Persian king Darius III in battle; the artwork, with its dramatic martial imagery and emotionally charged portraits, was likely based on a monumental Greek painting from the late fourth century BCE. Like the Lysippan sculptures appropriated by Metellus, the Alexander Mosaic in the House of the Faun praised the Roman patron by comparing him to the great Hellenistic king; the artwork also trumpeted his cultivated taste and the wealth needed to commission a technical marvel—a mosaic so detailed that it used millions of tesserae. Elsewhere in the house as well, the patron further revealed his taste for Hellenistic court art. He had mosaics with Nile landscape scenes, likely first popularized by the Ptolemaic dynasty in Alexandria, as well as a bronze statuette of a faun in the baroque style associated with the rulers of Pergamon. In this way, the Italian homeowner could imagine himself living like a king, in a house that was, indeed, larger than the royal palaces on the Pergamene citadel.



Figure 6.2 House of the Faun, Pompeii, second century BCE.

Photo: E. Pernice, Neg. D-DAI-ROM 32.1315.

The owner of the House of the Faun at Pompeii was not unusual in his taste for Hellenistic court art, although other options were also available. Roman patrons of the second century BCE could choose from an extensive repertoire of Greek-style objects, including “antiques,” copies of famous artworks, and new creations in Archaic, Classical, or Hellenistic styles; all of these appear in Republican Roman homes, and can be found as well in ancient shipwrecks of boats carrying Greek artworks to Italian markets. Nonetheless, the prevailing taste was for Hellenistic court art, and this is not surprising: it was the defining style of the contemporary Greek world. Furthermore, it linked the Romans closely to the Hellenistic monarchs who posed the greatest political challenge to their expanding empire, and whose defeat was their most cherished military accomplishment. By adopting kingly styles, in public and especially in private, the Romans advertised their intention to rival the great dynasties of the Greek world; Hellenistic art was the visual language of their aspirations, and also of their achievements.

From Republic to Principate: Greek Art in the New Imperial System

The latter years of the Republic were riven by civil strife, as aspiring generals fought to

dominate the state in a series of increasingly brutal internecine wars. Visually, the era was also marked by competition, with political rivals sponsoring ever more elaborate monuments and embracing divergent artistic styles (Zanker 1988a, 5–31). Political and artistic competition both came to an end with the ascension of Augustus to sole rule in 31 BCE. Although he avoided taking the title of king (preferring *princeps*, first man), Augustus effectively ruled the state, due to his control of the army and the major levers of political power as well as an immense personal fortune.

Augustus was in consequence the dominant patron of the period. He used his power and wealth for what the historian Ronald Syme has termed “the organization of opinion,” creating attractive images of the new political system, and disseminating them to a broad popular audience (Syme 1960, 459–475). He did so by deploying a visual language based above all on Greek art. For the first time, Hellenic styles and visual formats were deployed extensively in Roman *public* monuments; they were used not only for temples, but also for government and entertainment buildings, for portraits, and for historical reliefs; that is, sculpted narrative images depicting important contemporary individuals along with gods and personifications. Also new was the predominance in these monuments of Greek *classical* art, with fifth- and fourth-century BCE styles taking precedence over those of the archaic or hellenistic eras (Zanker 1988a, 239–263). When compared to the Roman Republic, the age of Augustus thus looked very different. Augustan Rome was no longer simply a (regionally distinctive) center of hellenistic art; rather, it was the driving force behind the formation of a new classicizing visual culture.

This classicizing visual culture was hybrid in nature, eclectic in style, and strikingly programmatic in intention. It is apparent, for example, in the copies and new works of classicizing art that gave an impressive air to Augustan state monuments. Copies permeated the emperor’s new forum: caryatids modeled on those of the Erechtheum in Athens adorned the porticoes, while Ionic capitals echoed those from the same building, and column bases copied those of the Propylaea, nearby on the Athenian Acropolis. New creations were also present, for instance an imposing bearded figure of Mars Ultor (Mars the Avenger) and portraits of the imperial house ([Figure 3.7](#)). For such works no specific Greek prototypes were available, and an array of classical styles was eclectically deployed to make new, yet traditional images; Mars, for example, had the exalted look of an Athenian general in the high classical style ([Figure 6.3](#)). These new creations, as well as the copies, depended for their effect on viewers recognizing the references to classical art, and appreciating the nuanced manner in which such references were used (Hölscher 2004). They were thus meant to appeal to connoisseurs, and their Greek styles were used expressively to reinforce the emperor’s programmatic message: that of a Golden Age, in which the greatest achievements of Greece were revived in Augustan Rome (Zanker 1988a, 167–192).



Figure 6.3 Statue of Mars Ultor, Flavian version of the cult statue from the Augustan Temple of Mars Ultor in the Forum Augustum. Rome, Musei Capitolini.

Photo: Neg. D-DAI-ROM 3149.

It is precisely this appeal to the connoisseur that constitutes the greatest difference between the Greek-style monuments of the Augustan regime and those of the mid-Republic. In the second century BCE, Greek art was, first and foremost, loot, the material reward of Roman military conquest. And the most attractive form of Greek art was that of the Hellenistic kings; its appearance in triumphs and manubial temples proclaimed, in clear and incontrovertible form, the kings' defeat and the new hegemony of Rome. By the Augustan era, by contrast, the Hellenic world had long been part of the Roman empire, and looting Greek art was considered gauche, if not in fact criminal. Augustus did, however, encourage the formation of publicly accessible collections, for instance those of M. Vipsanius Agrippa and C. Asinius Pollio; in such settings, Greek monuments could be enjoyed by the citizenry at large, rather than wealthy private patrons, and could be appreciated as art treasures instead of war booty. Moreover, the princeps embraced the classical style that was lauded by contemporary connoisseurs such as the artist and theoretician Pasiteles, whose five-volume treatise on Greek masterpieces likely focused on that era; the classicizing productions of his sculpture workshop certainly did (Pliny, *Natural History* 33.130, 35.156, 36.39–40). In this way, Augustus promoted a different kind of Greek art, and a new approach to it; the move from looting to collecting Greek art was a critical step in the development of Roman visual culture.

The same connoisseurial impulse also animated private patrons. It is evident, for example, in luxury villas such as the Villa of the Papyri in Herculaneum ([Figure 20.5](#) and Neudecker, [Chapter 20](#), this volume) and that of Oplontis ([Figure 26.3](#)), both seaside homes along the Bay of Naples with lavish Greek-style sculpture collections. It is also visible in Augustan wall paintings from both Rome and Pompeii. While earlier homeowners had decorated their rooms to evoke Hellenistic palaces and sanctuaries, those of the early principate referenced instead the contemporary Roman *pinacotheca* (picture gallery). They especially appreciated virtuoso *trompe l'oeil* renderings of framed panels and statues on pedestals, arranged within ornate fictive architectural settings. These decorative schemes had playful, even fantastical elements—candelabra sprouting vegetation, composite human–animal monsters, and so on—yet they had as their model real public and private picture galleries such as those described in Petronius's *Satyrica*. The wall paintings offered a less costly and more convenient decorative effect, but were actuated, no less than their models, by a reverence for Greek art.

Among the most exquisitely detailed and art-historically sophisticated of these painted *pinacothecae* are those of the Villa Farnesina ([Figure 6.4](#); cf. Hallett 2005, 433–435). This suburban pleasure villa, situated just across the Tiber from the civic center of Rome, had a decorative program dating to the late first century BCE; it was a top-level commission, associated by some scholars with the imperial family. In the villa, three bedrooms had well-preserved examples of painted art collections, with framed panels and statues set against white and red backgrounds. The images were intended to evoke works of Greek art from chronologically disparate periods; for example, in Cubiculum B we see a central panel

executed in the atmospheric painterly style of the later fourth century BCE, flanked by two smaller ones in the clear linear manner of the high classical era. Above them are projecting caryatid statues in the rich style of the late fifth century, and cult images in fictive niches, whose closed forms and stiff, static postures evoke archaic precedents. Taken together, the images provided a condensed history of Greek art, with objects juxtaposed for maximum stylistic contrast, yet all incorporated within an orderly and balanced architectural framework. Thus here too, as in state monuments, the images presupposed a cultivated viewer, able to appreciate the varied references to the Hellenic past. And at the same time, they documented the visual subordination of that past to a contemporary Roman present, as choice elements of it were collected and displayed for the delectation of the domestic spectator.



Figure 6.4 Painted pinacotheca of cubiculum “B,” Villa Farnesina, Rome, Augustan. Museo Nazionale Romano (Palazzo Massimo alle Terme), Rome, Italy.

Photo: Tetraktys/Wikimedia Commons.

In the private sphere, then, we see the same connoisseurial appreciation for Greek art as was observed for the major public commissions of the princeps. At the same time, we should note as well some important distinctions in the way in which Hellenic models were adapted in

public and private settings during the Augustan era. First, one might stress the continuity observable in Greek-style works from the private sphere, where they had been deployed from the mid-Republic onwards for every conceivable decorative purpose. In public monuments, by contrast, there is a sense of rupture, as a new Hellenic style was used to highlight the change from the past, and the formation of the principate.

So, too, Augustan private monuments remained extremely wide-ranging in style, with a continued fondness for Hellenistic art; classical imagery never predominated, as it did in the public sphere. This should not, on reflection, come as a surprise. In private, Hellenistic styles were particularly well suited to depict Aphrodite, Dionysos, and their followers, whose images were extremely popular in Roman domestic spaces; they were in effect the presiding deities of *otium*. In public, by contrast, Hellenistic styles were associated above all with Greek monarchs and their powerfully ambitious Roman emulators; these were models to be avoided by a princeps who carefully refused the title of king. Augustus instead sought out works of art in the classical style: their idealized naturalism gave precisely the exalted air that he considered appropriate to the dignity of the emperor, his family, and his gods. At the same time, the beauty inherent in the classical style suggested, metaphorically, the attractions of the principate; this helps to explain the continued popularity of the style and its diffusion throughout the empire.

The Hadrianic–Antonine Era: Adapting Greek Art in the Roman Provinces

Romans of the second century CE inhabited a wealthy, politically stable, and globally interconnected world. Their empire encompassed most of Europe, with borders in northern Britain and along the Rhine and Danube rivers; a large part of the Middle East, including modern Turkey, Syria, Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, the Arabian peninsula, and Iraq as far as the Euphrates river; and all of coastal North Africa, from Morocco in the west to Egypt in the east. The inhabitants of these diverse regions were united by a centralized government in Rome, a limited but sufficient provincial bureaucracy, common languages (Greek in the east and Latin in the west), and a large army, which discouraged both invasion from outside and widespread civil insurrection. Due to such safeguards, their empire was increasingly prosperous, its borders comparatively secure, and its core free from major contests for imperial power between the accession of Trajan in 96 CE and the death of Commodus a century later.

Peace and stability encouraged the movement of goods and people throughout the Roman empire. Sculptures from Turkey, cut glass from Germany, and mold-made terracotta bowls from France made their way to the great ports around the Mediterranean, and often penetrated, via riverine passages, far into the continental interior. So, too, for major building projects, materials could travel far: granite from Egypt, pavonazzetto marble from eastern Turkey, and cipollino from Euboea in Greece were used on imperial benefactions throughout the Empire, and on occasion by private patrons as well. Itinerant craftsmen of all sorts were a characteristic feature of Roman society; architects, sculptors, smiths, glassblowers, and

leatherworkers moved about, either on their own initiative or at the behest of major institutions such as the army. In this way, the Roman Empire in the second century CE enjoyed an increasingly cosmopolitan visual culture, one especially extensive at elite levels but discernable as well lower down the social scale.

This visual culture took particular inspiration from Greek art. By the Hadrianic–Antonine era, Hellenic forms and styles constituted a critical part of the Roman Empire’s artistic *koine*—the common visual language that made possible communication among a vast and diverse populace. Together with more paradigmatically Roman components (for example, descriptive portraiture and concrete architecture), we see much throughout the Empire that is distinctively Greek: columns and pediments, idealized yet naturalistic divine statues, complex mythological narratives. The popularity of these Hellenic forms in the Hadrianic–Antonine period owes something to the Second Sophistic, a retrospective movement focused on the cultural achievements of classical Greece. It is indebted as well to the contemporary wealth and political prominence of the Greek East, site of an economic revival in the second century CE and home to many members of the senatorial and equestrian orders. Yet the Empire-wide popularity of Greek art in the Hadrianic–Antonine era was first and foremost an indigenous Roman development; it was the transmission of the visual culture of the metropolis to an ever-increasing audience.

Among the most striking manifestations of this culture were the Greek-inspired monumental building façades that marked the architectural landscapes of ambitious cities (Yegül 1982). A good example is the Library of Celsus at Ephesus, a visually stunning work erected in the provincial capital of Asia Minor during late Trajanic and early Hadrianic times ([Figure 24.9](#); cf. Smith 1998, 73–75). The library’s two-story façade was adorned with a riotous array of colored marble; the projecting columns were purple-veined pavonazzetto, the capitals, arches, and pediments of white Ephesian stone. The façade was pierced by three doorways and six windows; there were also four niches for sculpture on the lower story, along with four corresponding statues on projecting pedestals above. The overall effect was one of rich color and rhythmic movement, an almost undulating surface with vivid contrasts of light and shadow. With its grandiloquent inscriptions and elaborately detailed ornamentation, the façade offered a glamorous introduction to the library inside; its combination of traditional Greek elements with an up-to-date Roman manner served appropriately to commemorate Ti. Iulius Celsus Polemaenus—Greek by birth, but also a Roman army officer, consul, and proconsul.

Similar monumental façades adorned a host of other buildings as well during the Hadrianic–Antonine period. They were particularly popular in the marble-rich provinces of Greece and Turkey; examples include the Market Gate of Miletus, the Nymphaeum of Herodes Atticus at Olympia, and the aediculated façades, often known as *Kaisersäle* or imperial cult halls, that decorated bath–gymnasium complexes in the Greek East. However, they also occurred in the western provinces, above all as scene buildings in theaters; their usefulness was due to their flexibility, as they served to lend a grand air to public buildings of all sorts. The monumental façades were paradigmatic works of Roman “display architecture,” showcasing the wealth and ambition of their patrons as well as familiarity with Greek forms. By no means structurally necessary to the buildings they adorned, they had nonetheless a serious and important function

for their commissioners and viewers. Their aim was visibly to represent *humanitas*, civilization—inspired by ancient Greece, but in its contemporary manifestations made possible by the peace and prosperity of the Roman Empire.

The same *humanitas* could likewise be demonstrated by Greek-style images of gods and mythological figures deployed in Roman public spaces. Such images frequently adorned monumental building façades, and appeared as well in Roman fora, temples, baths, and amphitheaters. These works of ideal sculpture—generally over-lifesize statues, technically adept, and highly impressive *en masse*—had styles and visual formats inspired by Greek art, and were indeed often modeled on well-known classical types. Yet they had a distinctly un-Hellenic effect when grouped in heterogeneous sculpture programs, inserted into Roman architectural complexes, and juxtaposed with portraits of contemporary benefactors or the imperial family. In their new settings, these retrospective images connected viewers with the grand cultural traditions of the empire, as though Greece and Rome, once fiercely opposed rivals, were now part of a seamless and enduring continuum (Kousser 2008, 100–106). They also served to give elegant visual form to the ambitions and identities of their patrons; Celsus, for example, had personifications of Wisdom, Virtue, Knowledge, and Intelligence adorning his library, along with portraits of himself and his son.

This was no less true in the Latin West than in the eastern Mediterranean. Along the German border, for instance, we see a host of monuments known as Jupiter columns, which featured a crowning statue of the sky god atop a tall column, and a base with inscriptions and smaller images of divinities in relief ([Figures 6.5, 25.10](#)). Commissioned by the region's governing elite, the Jupiter columns were, in their iconography, resolutely cosmopolitan, with sculptural types that were Hellenic in origin and popularized by Rome (Kousser 2008, 91–100). A Jupiter column from the Saarburg region near the provincial capital of Trier, for instance, had a crowning group of Jupiter on horseback trampling a snaky-legged giant; the basic composition goes back to classical grave stelai such as the famous Athenian monument of Dexileos, was adopted for Roman emperors on historical reliefs like the Great Trajanic Frieze, and was frequently used for the funerary commemoration of soldiers on the German frontier. For the Jupiter column, it was translated into three dimensions and given greater cosmological resonances, as the king of gods triumphed over a bestial figure of disorder. However, it was rendered in a bravura version of Hellenistic style—note the bulging muscles of the giant, his agitated hair, and his anguished facial expression—that was all the more impressive given the soft, friable sandstone in which it was executed. Such images gave recognizable Greco-Roman form to gods and religious practices that were intimately connected to local traditions; very often on the columns, Jupiter held a wheel associating him with the Celtic sky god Taranis, and the columnar form itself may harken back to regional customs of tree worship. In this way, the Jupiter columns allowed local members of the wealthy ruling class to assert their sophisticated knowledge of Greco-Roman culture, while at the same time adhering to and indeed enhancing age-old traditions of religious practice.



Figure 6.5 Jupiter on horseback fighting a snake-legged giant, fragment of a Jupiter column, Sarrebourg, Trier, Rheinisches Landesmuseum.

Photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY.

By the second century CE, Roman public art throughout the empire was thus permeated by Hellenic forms and styles; the same was no less true of artwork from the private sphere. Particularly striking in this regard are funerary monuments, which had previously adhered more closely to local traditions. In the Hadrianic–Antonine era, these were replaced by an international taste for sarcophagi: large-scale, intricately carved coffins of marble, frequently decorated with scenes from Greek mythology ([Figure 15.4](#)). They commemorated the wealthy deceased in a somewhat oblique fashion, using myths to suggest the pain of separation, the virtues of the departed, or the pleasures of the afterlife. A number of sarcophagi even featured portraits of the deceased joined to the bodies of the mythological protagonists, making explicit the relevance of Hellenic tradition for contemporary Roman life. In this way they were similar to the portraits *in formam deorum* (in the form of gods), likewise popular at the time, which showed successful businessmen as the mercantile divinity Mercury, or wives in the guise of the beautiful love goddess Venus. Both the sarcophagi and the funerary portraits encouraged their Roman patrons to make sense of their world through the medium of Greek myth and art; they gave an elevated and traditional visual form to contemporary aspirations, emotions, and desires (Kousser 2007). Thus, in private funerary commemoration as in the public monuments considered above, Greek art served as the vehicle for Roman self-representation: it gave a visually compelling and culturally sophisticated aura to a broad range of patrons, including slaves and freedmen as well as the established aristocracy.

A final sphere in which Greek art dominated was that of the private home, and in particular the wealthy country villa (cf. Neudecker, [Chapter 20](#), this volume). The emperor Hadrian's complex at Tivoli, 17 miles outside Rome, constitutes the most imaginative and extensive example of this, with recreations of such paradigmatically Hellenic sites as the temple of Aphrodite on Knidos, the Painted Stoa in Athens, and the Serapeum near Alexandria (Opper 2008, 130–165; [Figure 20.6](#)). There the emperor, a famous traveler, could enjoy visiting some of the most famous tourist destinations in the ancient world and re-creating the activities practiced in them: boating down the Nile to the Serapeum, say, or conversing on philosophical subjects while strolling in the Stoa. The Tivoli villa thus gave Hadrian and his guests access to Greek art through the medium of bodily experience, allowing for a more intense and profound connection than that created by mere visual contemplation. Other villa owners likewise aimed for the same effect, albeit with the more limited means at their disposal; they excerpted and miniaturized, or selected a particularly desirable Hellenic feature for emulation. Yet they were united in aiming for a Greek ambiance, however far they lived from the source of Hellenic culture; we see villa sculpture collections in France, elaborate mythological mosaics in North Africa, and marble-veneered walls in Britain. Indeed, there is no more impressive testimony to the attractions of Greco-Roman villa culture than its spread throughout the Empire, not only within the Mediterranean region but even to northern Europe—where villa gardens must have been damp and muddy much of the year, and the rooms around the peristyle uncomfortably

drafty in winter. Despite these inconveniences, the villa remained a paradigm for luxurious country living; it made manifest the pleasures of Greco-Roman civilization for an ethnically diverse but culturally unified group of wealthy homeowners.

As this brief discussion of the Hadrianic–Antonine period suggests, Greek art had a continued importance for Romans in the second century CE. No longer a novelty in state monuments or private spaces, Hellenic forms and styles were central throughout Roman visual culture. In addition to the manifestations detailed here, Greek art also influenced important high imperial genres such as mosaics and gem carving; Hellenic images and myths were also critical to pantomime, the song-and-dance spectacle that was the most popular form of entertainment at this time. Indeed, it is difficult to discern an artistic genre of the period that is *not* in some manner tied to Greek art; utilitarian buildings are perhaps a partial exception, yet even the warehouses at the important port of Ostia are adorned with Greek-style capitals and pilasters, carefully fashioned out of brick.

What distinguishes the Hadrianic–Antonine era is the geographical extent, stylistic diversity, and personal appeal of the Greek forms and styles that the Romans chose to deploy. By the end of the second century CE, Hellenic imagery appeared throughout the Empire, from London to Damascus, and from the straits of Gibraltar to the Euphrates. So, too, it was embraced in all its diverse manifestations; the classical repertoire was perhaps pre-eminent, but archaic and especially Hellenistic styles were popular as well. And finally, Greek forms were connected more closely than ever before with individual Roman patrons, who set their public portraits within monumental Greek-style building façades, or “dressed up” as gods and mythological heroes on their tombs. In this way, the second century CE marks not so much the end as the high point of the Roman adaptation of Greek art.

Conclusions

In conclusion, it is worth considering why Roman adaptations of Greek art were both so extensive and so long-lasting in their popularity, and then, briefly, addressing the questions of when and how they ceased to be so. Individual cases will of course vary, but my sense is that Hellenic images were useful to the Romans because they were exalted, distanced, and metaphorical; that is, symbolic rather than literal in their meaning. Divorced from the constraints of everyday life, these images could express powerful aspirations and desires—for example, a Republican general’s monarchical ambitions, or the passionate love of a respectable *materfamilias* for her husband. Greek art offered a vehicle for the safe articulation of such emotions, while its idealization of forms, mythological *dramatis personae*, and antique flavor prevented them from being interpreted too literally. In essence, the Romans dreamed in Greek; Hellenic art gave them a pleasurable form of release from the limits placed on quotidian existence.

These dreams did not, however, continue uninterrupted into late antiquity. It is true that Hellenic images still appeared at times in Roman art, particularly in the private sphere: Greek-style mythological statuettes, mosaics, and silver adorned the grandiose villas of the landed

aristocracy, while Hellenic forms and myths decorated the sarcophagi and catacombs of wealthy metropolitan citizens. The continued deployment of such images is not surprising given their longstanding popularity and broad acceptance throughout the empire, as well as the conservatism of their Roman elite patrons. Yet even these private monuments bear witness to a highly *selective* attitude toward Greek tradition. Nudity was covered up, eroticism toned down, and the vast mythological repertoire contracted to a limited number of approved themes. Such changes were necessary accommodations to a society that was sharply divided and rapidly transforming; they helped to render acceptable and inoffensive these references to the classical—and pagan—past as the Roman Empire became Christian (Kousser 2008, 122–135).

In public monuments, further accommodations were required. Images of the old gods and scenes of pagan religious ritual were replaced, albeit slowly, with Christian symbols: the fish, the cross, the Chi Rho. New lavish churches were built, and traditional sanctuaries saw their funds dry up, their most prominent worshippers depart, and their sacrifices draw to a close. Triumphal monuments were still dedicated, and retained some of their conventional divine apparatus, but they were adorned as well with Christian symbols in an uneasy coexistence of old and new. Where Greek images did appear was in art collections; celebrated monuments of the ancient world, such as the Aphrodite of Knidos, were taken from their traditional sanctuary homes and brought to adorn Constantinople, the Empire's new capital (cf. Bravi, [Chapter 7](#), this volume). In some ways, this can be understood as a continuation of long-standing Roman practices; for the late antique emperors, as for their Republican and Augustan predecessors, the Hellenic antiques had a value as both loot and art. However, the desacralization of cult statues was also part of a broader effort to discourage, and eventually eradicate, pagan worship. This also encompassed restrictions on animal sacrifice; the abolition of priesthoods; the destruction of temples, or their conversion into churches; and attacks on pagan religious images. The Aphrodite of Knidos was unusually fortunate in the circumstances of her preservation, while other works of art were smashed into thousands of pieces, or buried, preemptively, by their beleaguered worshippers. There is perhaps no more powerful attestation to the allure of Greek art for the Romans than the frequently violent circumstances of its demise in late antiquity; only what desperately mattered would be so vehemently and irrevocably destroyed.

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Given the limited space and textbook format of this chapter, references have necessarily been kept to an absolute minimum. I have selected those that seemed to me essential due to their importance to my argument, their influence on the field, their accessibility to students, and their utility as guides to further reading on the topic.

The Roman *copying* of Greek art has long been a central subject of scholarly discussion, while the *adaptation* by the Romans of Hellenic forms and styles has in contrast been neglected. Significant treatments of the former topic began in the eighteenth century with Johann Joachim Winckelmann's *History of Ancient Art* (1764–1766). Adolf Furtwängler's *Masterpieces of Greek Sculpture* (1895) codified the practice of using classicizing Roman sculptures to

reconstruct the history of Greek art, and both his methods and his conclusions remain influential. From the 1970s onwards, however, scholars have increasingly questioned the assumptions underlying such works. Among the most extensive recent treatments of the question have been Marvin (2008), examining the historiography of “Roman copies,” and Perry (2005), focusing on the ancient literary sources.

For the broader topic of adaptation, less has been done, but there are some promising avenues of research. Hölscher (2004) analyzes the Roman use of Greek styles from a semiotic perspective, correlating particular Hellenic styles with different types of Roman subject matter. A related approach is taken in Zanker (1988a), which highlights the programmatic use of classical styles in the state monuments of the new imperial regime. The essays collected in Gazda (2002) give a good sense of the range of approaches to artistic retrospection current in the scholarly literature today; Hallett (2005) offers a thoughtful and balanced review of this work and Perry’s book, and poses useful questions for further research.

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CHAPTER 7

The Art of Late Antiquity

A Contextual Approach

Alessandra Bravi

Art between Conservation and Change

In late antiquity, art actively participated in historical developments. New public monuments were erected in conjunction with political and institutional transformations; the messages conveyed by their decoration's subject matter changed according to circumstances; images expressed the rise of new social mindsets and religious beliefs.

For the Roman senators of the late fourth century CE, the order and location of traditional images represented the continuity of social harmony founded on tradition and consensus. The prefecture of Praetextatus especially symbolizes the conservatism of the aristocratic class. In 367/8 CE Praetextatus restored the Porticus of the Di Consentes (the “Consenting Gods” were protectors of the senate) and their *sacrosancta simulacra*, the bronze statues depicting these deities (*CIL* VI 102). Initiated into the mysteries of Eleusis, a devotee of the Magna Mater and of Sol Invictus, Praetextatus and his religious culture (as that of many Roman aristocrats) reveal a tradition that continually redraws its boundaries.

In the world of late antique images, the dynamics of change emerge as a profound dialectic between continuity and rupture, conservation and transformation. The rules and significations assumed by figurative art were involved in incessant change varying from place to place.

Subject matters, styles, and objects of representation surpassed the boundaries defined by tradition, and they eventually brought about visible changes. New constellations took shape in a game of comparisons and interactions. The vocabulary of art and the forms of its style were changing; subjects were reinterpreted and used in new ways; rules of perception were taking new directions; familiar art objects adopted new forms. The vacillation between identity and difference, continuity and rapture, tradition and innovation adapted to various situations. The tendency to preserve the traditional heritage of forms and cultural patterns alternated with processes of change. The confrontation between old and new, between tradition, memory, and innovation, also manifested itself in different ways in local contexts.

Some developments were interpreted as momentous events and revolutions, and they greatly influenced the view of late antiquity and its images in the eyes of scholars, poets, and intellectuals. In the reign of Theodosius (379–395 CE), the rhetorician Libanius delivered an oration in defense of pagan temples. The small temples and sanctuaries dotting the countryside constituted its proper soul, Libanius argued, but were being destroyed by monks and peasants, while in cities such buildings could be converted to other uses (*Oration* 30). Libanius lamented physical alterations to temples and sacred precincts, which for the pagan orator were

the primary exhibition spaces for artworks. Yet such changes were neither unique nor did they influence “globally” (from East to West) the life of images or the perception of the meanings expressed by their subject matter. Changes manifested at different times and in different ways. In political spaces, artworks followed the change of institutions and official structures of power, while in the mundane imaginary, reinterpretations followed the trends of social practices, repeated rituals, and consolidated attitudes.

In the early sixth century, in the sumptuous Baths of Zeuxippus in Constantinople, an assembly of learned men and common people gathered to admire, under the guidance of the poet Cristodorus, the bronze statues depicting mythological and divine characters. These artifacts expressed the identity of the Greek past, a past immanent in Constantinople since its foundation. In this type of assembly, called *panhellenia* by these intellectuals (Synesius, *Letters* 101), the classical artworks, inspired by their ancient tradition, strengthened the sense of adherence to the values of the Greek past. Under Theodosius, in the palace of Lausus, a court of Neoplatonists and Christians around Eudocia contemplated the oldest Greek figurative models. For instance, the Zeus of Phidias and the Aphrodite of Cnidus were now objects of a new kind of worship: they embodied the common faith of the Hellenes, strengthened by the ideology of the “Greco-Roman” empire of Theodosius (Millar 2006).

In political spaces, the reenactment of memory through imagery could take different forms with civic and collective undertones. In late fifth-century Rome, a statue of Minerva was restored by the city prefect Anicius Acilius Aginatus Faustus (*PLRE* II 451–452; Lizzi Testa 2004, 286; La Rocca 2010). During civil unrest caused by the troops of the patrician Ricimerus against those of Anthemius, the statue of Minerva had been damaged by the collapse of a roof. After Anthemius’ death and the end of the conflict, the city prefect returned the statue to its original site. This re-erection symbolized the mending of wounds caused by the events and the return of *beatitudo temporis*: as in the time of Augustus, images still had the power to restore a social order shattered by civil unrest (*CIL* VI 164).

During the Gothic War, Procopius described the sense of abandonment conveyed by certain once magnificent sites in Rome and the neglect of still visible classical statues, the monumental threat to a memory of magnificence that was going to disappear. Procopius noticed the *Palladia* in the Campus Martius and the statues of Phidias and Myron in the Forum of Peace among the cattle herds grazing on the abandoned site (Procopius, *Gothic War* 8.21.12–13). In the years following Procopius’ visit to Rome and after the passage of the Byzantine armies, the bronze elephants on the *porta Triumphalis* were on the verge of ruin (Cassiodorus, *Letters* 10.30). The request for their restoration occurred when the city was preparing to welcome a new imperial *adventus* (La Rocca 2010).

The images could demonstrate great resilience and maintain their traditional functions, or they could be designified and reinterpreted. The process of reinterpretation intensified in the early fifth century, fueled by changing fruition contexts and collective mentalities. At Athens, the city goddess was chosen, by virtue of her identity as guardian of wisdom, as the *philosophos theos* of the Neoplatonists (Marinus, *Life of Proclus* 30). When the leader of this school of wise men, the Neoplatonist philosopher Proclus, was about to die (485 CE), he dreamed that the

statue of Athena Parthenos approached him to ask for asylum in his house, as it was threatened with being dislodged from the Parthenon “by those who move the immovable” (i.e., the Christians; Marinus, *Life of Proclus* 30; Trombley 1993–1994). The House of Proclus has been identified in a complex found on the southern slope of the Acropolis. The niches along the walls of the *aula absidata* (apsidal hall) probably housed sculptures and, at the time of Proclus, sacrifices were still carried out there (Frantz 1988). During the fourth and fifth centuries, philosophers (the guardians of *paideia*, Greek education) proclaimed themselves crucial to the conservation of traditional values. Located in baths, bouleuteria, and schools, their statues presented them as holy men. In the schools of Athens, Ephesus, Aphrodisias, Constantinople, and Rome, they appeared on medallions with flowing hair and beards, watching visitors with lively eyes ([Figure 7.1](#)), like those of Proclus as described by his biographer Marinus (Marinus, *Life of Proclus* 23). Eunapius describes them as priests, so distinct from common men they looked like colossal statues (Zanker 2000). The practice of philosophy kept alive images that embodied the values of wisdom and the models of knowledge established by the ancient “Hellenes.” At the end of the fourth century, Synesius of Cyrene attributed the decay of the previously dignified and ornate look of public spaces in Athens to the decline of social practices associated with philosophy. Between 395 and 399, Synesius noticed the absence of the paintings of the *stoa Poikile*, which had perhaps been removed for restoration after the sack of Athens by Alaric. Devoid of their decorative apparatus, the sites of Athens lost their value, and their names no longer reflected the activities that once took place in these spaces. As Synesius observes (*Letters* 135 (136), transl. A. Fitzgerald):

Athens has no longer anything sublime except the country's famous names! ... ever since philosophy left these precincts, there is nothing for the tourist to admit except the Academy, the Lyceum, and—by Zeus!—the Stoa Poikile which has given its name to the philosophy of Chrysippus. This is no longer decorated, for the proconsul has taken away the panels on which Polygnotus of Thasos has displayed his skill.

In some cases the changes were accelerated and became entrenched by ideological surges at the centers of institutional and legislative power. Christian intellectuals sought to direct the gaze of the elites and the emperor to see pagan idols differently. At the court of Theodosius, for instance, Prudentius proclaimed that real adornment shone only in those statues from which the blood of sacrifices had been scoured (*Against Symmachus* 1.501–505). In the fourth century, Christian intellectuals attacked the theological significance of cult statues: Eusebius in Constantinople, Prudentius, Ambrose, and Augustine in the West denounced the dangers of excessive consideration given to pagan idols, which still dominated the *fora* and public spaces of many cities. Statues triggered ideological conflicts and conservation efforts, which rendered these works vehicles of intense signification.



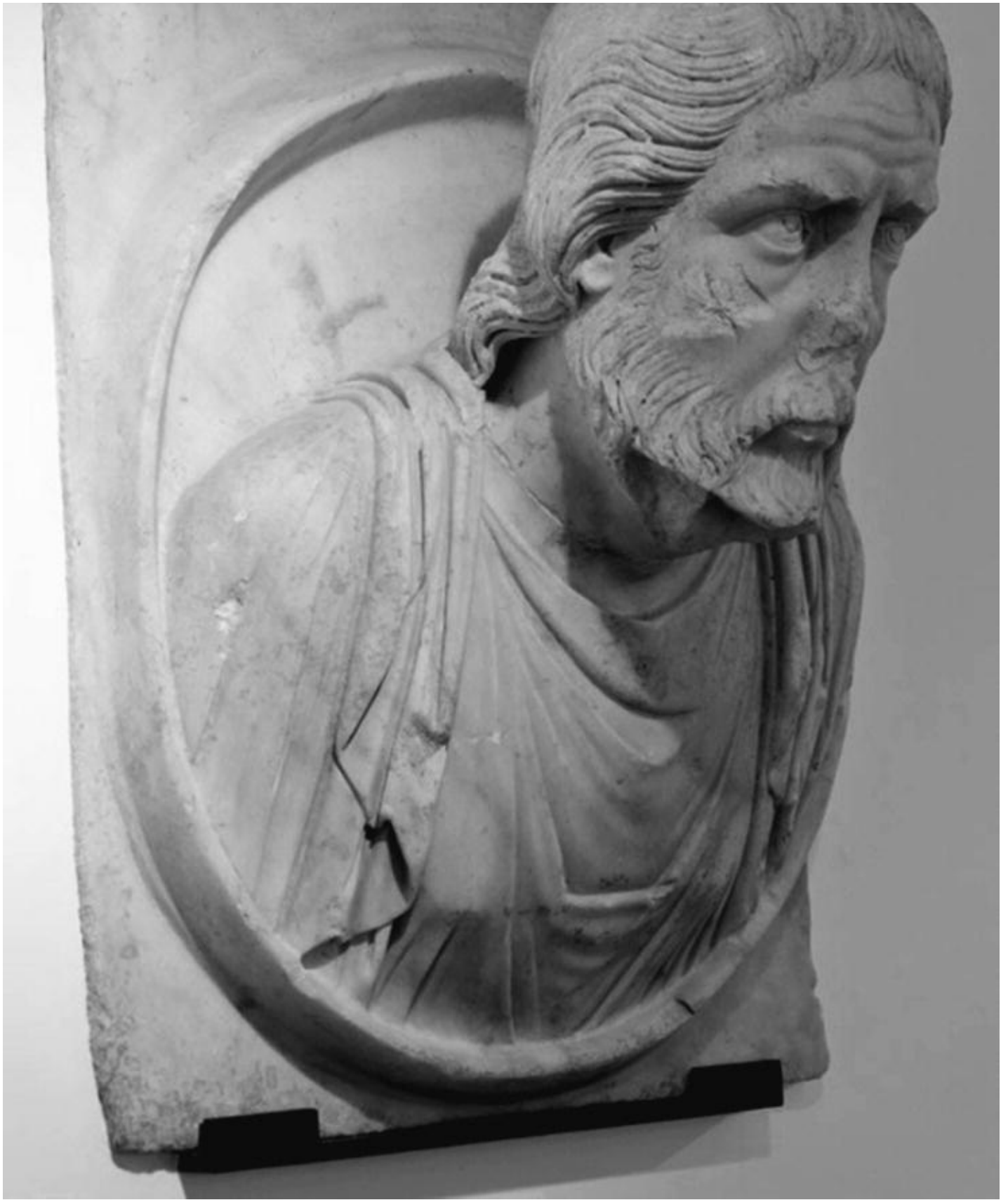


Figure 7.1 Tondo portrait of a late antique philosopher from the “Philosopher’s School” at Aphrodisias. Aphrodisias, Museum.

Photo: Patrick Kelley with kind permission.

Trends in the Visual *Habitus* and Transformations of *saeculum*

Figurative artworks in public spaces

After the rise of Diocletian and until the sixth century in some cases, small and large cities throughout the empire contained a stratified world of honorary statues in public places. Political space was marked by images representing civic identities and power relations (see Fejfer, [Chapter 12](#), this volume). Imperial portraits were predominant in these environments, and their style changed according to new concepts and new definitions of charisma. The third century inaugurated the image of a new kind of emperor. The porphyry statues of the Tetrarchs expressed their equally shared power through the absence of individual facial features. A more overtly divine imperial charisma manifested in the fourth century. The arch erected after 312 in Rome to celebrate Constantine's victorious *adventus* synthesized the different modes of representing the emperor with which Roman art had experimented: Hadrian stands for piety toward the pagan gods and mastery of the natural environment; Trajan represents heroic valor in battle, conveyed through an intense movement and naturalism of figures; Marcus Aurelius conveys imperial clemency as a typical relationship between emperor and citizens. In the Constantinian reliefs, the abovementioned imperial qualities transform into a stillness that takes on abstract proportions. The battle scenes and ceremonies from Constantine's contemporary present, which surround the arch in the middle zone, show warring armies, the senate, the plebs, and aristocrats engaged in public rituals during Constantine's entry into Rome (cf. L'Orange and von Gerkan 1939). From the perspective of our conceptions of style, these reliefs may appear to be breaking classical rules: note the absence of natural forms and objects, the relationship between figures and the space in which they move, the lack of proportion, the wanting realism in the rendering of human bodies, while clothes and objects have lost any sense of materiality. The *largitio* panel (distribution of money; [Figure 7.2](#); L'Orange and von Gerkan 1939) shows the emperor surrounded by senators. The lack of naturalism in the rendering of forms and the repetitive representations of gestures and clothing emphasize global meanings and abstract frameworks: the homogeneity of the senatorial class, unified by a common *habitus*; Constantine's role as *primus inter pares* (first among equals) among this class; the harmonious unfolding of public life in cities. The emperor remains fixed amid the animated figures of the senate and the people around him. In this period, imperial portraits were characterized by an abstract majesty, which is embodied in an image that looks "drained" of any naturalistic traits (La Rocca 2000). Some reworked portraits preserve naturalistic traits in the background. In Bolsena, a portrait of Augustus was recut into an image of Constantine, which was displayed in the basilica a short time after the battle at the Milvian Bridge (Giuliano 1991).



Figure 7.2 Detail of the Constantinian frieze on the Arch of Constantine, *largitio* scene.

Photo: William Storage/Wikimedia Commons.

In the colossal portraits that dominated the urban areas of Rome and Constantinople, however, Constantine presented himself as energetic general and *deus praesens* fitting to these sites. In the Basilica of Maxentius he appeared as seated Jupiter ([Figure 7.3](#)); after his victory over Licinius, his equestrian statue in the Strategion of Constantinople depicted him as victorious commander surrounded by Greek heroes; in contrast, in the center of his Forum Heroon in Constantinople he was shown as the inspired sovereign in a statue atop a column of porphyry. These portraits exemplify the description of a Gallic orator, who in 310 already spoke of Constantine's *fulgor oculorum*, the shining splendor of his eyes. Constantine is young, fortunate, bringer of salvation and safety, and gentle looking (*iuvenis et laetus et salutifer et pulcherrimus imperator: Panegyricus Latinus 7.21*), as only inspired rulers and demigods such as Achilles and Alexander used to be.



Figure 7.3 Colossal portrait of Constantine from the Basilica of Maxentius. Rome, Palazzo dei Conservatori.

Photo: Jean-Christophe Benoist/Wikimedia Commons.

In public spaces and next to the figures of the emperor, *potentiores* and other men of rank memorialized their achievements. The emperors awarded statues of silver or gilded bronze to magistrates and the most senior senators: in 377 Lucius Aurelius Avianius Symmachus received statues in Rome and Constantinople from the emperors Valens, Valentinian II, and Gratian (Bauer 2003). Themistius received the same honor from Emperor Constantius II and from an unnamed emperor. The Forum of Trajan was an impressive monument to Roman *honor* (distinction), with its multiple statues dedicated to eminent personalities. In a letter to a friend, Sidonius Apollinaris prides himself for having received an honorific statue in Rome; in 435, Flavius Merobaudes received a statue praising both his military *virtus* (bravery) and the intellect of the poet (Bauer 2007). The senate of Constantinople dedicated statues to Jacob, court physician of Leo I, in the Baths of Zeuxippos (Bauer 2003). There too, Philip Bardanes had a highly realistic portrait in the eighth century that was praised by the bathing crowds (*Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai* 82; Bravi 2014). The fora, theaters, baths, and racetracks of the cities of the Empire maintained an active social life until the sixth century. Their statue decoration was repaired, renewed, or increased according to the activities that took place in the political centers of major and minor cities (Witschel 2007). This “statuary *habitus*” (Machado 2010) was maintained during the fifth century; it then slowly disappeared following the changing mechanisms of attributing political distinction, and the concomitant changes in social structures and urban topographies.

Late antiquity is also characterized by the busy traffic of artworks from one place of the *oikoumene* to another, and also between spaces and buildings of a city. This transfer network is especially active in the eastern Mediterranean between Constantine and Theodosius II. Looting and changes in the function and perception of images accompanied the construction of new buildings and the repurposing of old spaces, or their loss of function and disposal. Constantinople, capital of the new Greco-Roman empire on the Bosphorus, exemplifies this phenomenon. Constantine instilled a sense of place in the city by decorating it with ancient statues (Figure 7.4). According to one critic (Hieronymus, *Chronicle* 331) Constantinople was built on the plunder of the most vibrant cities of the *oikoumene*. Markets, porticoes, churches, and streets were populated by images of heroes, poets, mythological figures, honorary portraits, pagan idols, and political symbols, previously located in prestigious sacred spaces in the Greek world and Rome. These statues now inhabited the most prominent sites of Constantinople.

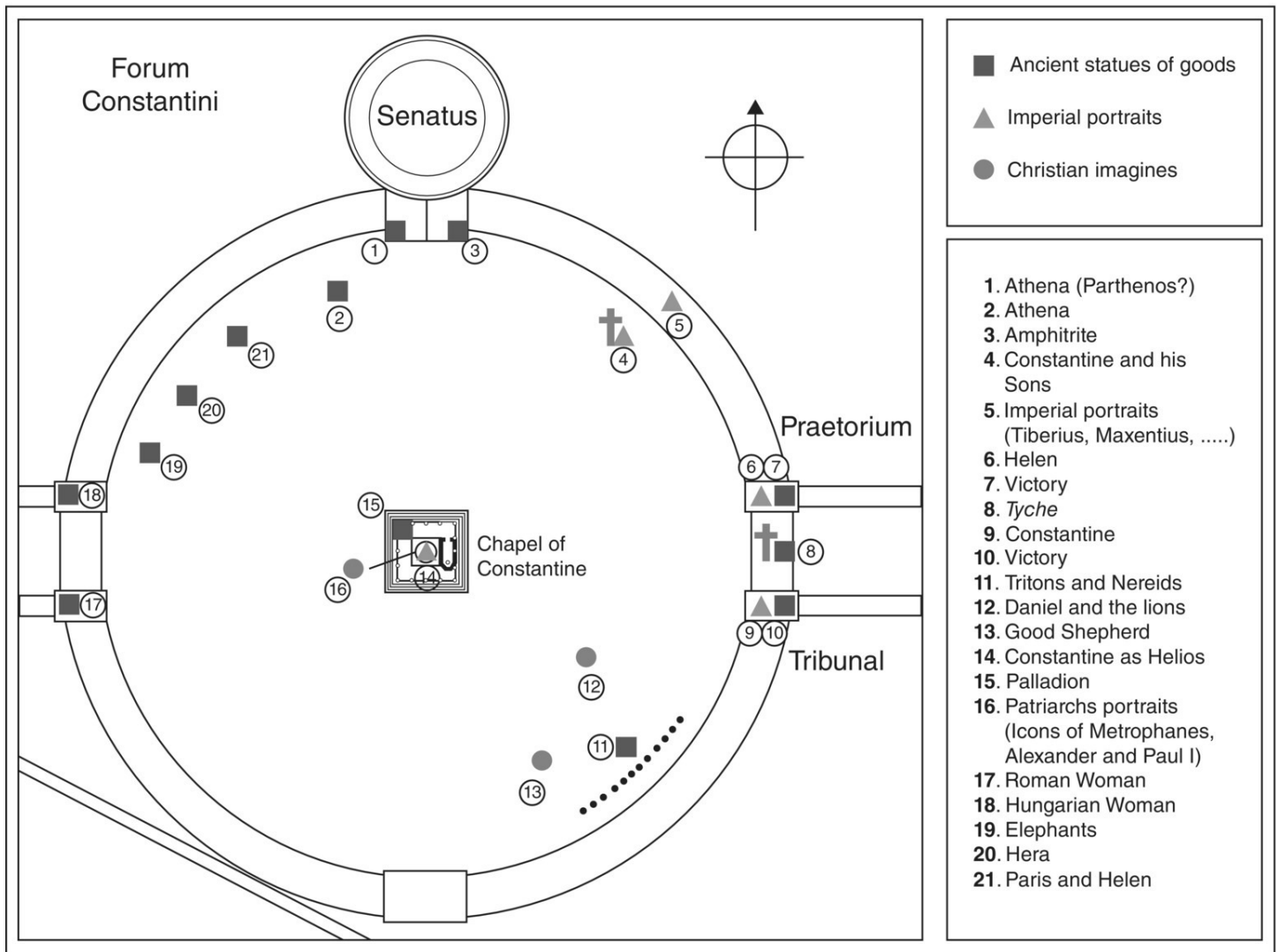


Figure 7.4 Distribution of images in the Forum of Constantine at Constantinople.

© Alessandra Bravi.

In late antique cities traditional figurative types, athletes, mythological characters, gods, and heroes, were still deployed in neuralgic centers. The monuments, squares, and porticoes of Aphrodisias in Asia Minor remained richly decorated until the sixth century, with new acquisitions and reused items. Heroic statues and mythological groups were often relocated to the courtyards of public baths, as appropriate bearers of meaning. In the Hadrianic Baths, a statue of an athlete continued to signify the traditional associations of the gymnasium, where such images complemented the activities of the *palaestra* (Smith 2011, 217). Between the late fourth and the early fifth centuries, statues were removed from the sanctuary of Aphrodite, which was then converted into a church. However, the motifs of Aphrodite's entourage could still be perceived as fitting to baths or similarly aquatic places, such as the statue of Venus Anadyomene that, in late antiquity, was placed in the Baths of Caracalla (Curran 1994, 51). In one of the extant Nymphaea of Sagalassos (the Nymphaeum of the Upper Agora), an over-lifesized group of Dionysus with Satyr was on display until the collapse of the monument in the late sixth century, while the rest of the Antonine decoration was replaced early in the sixth century with new statues from other places (Figure 7.5; Mägele 2011). The statues were moved

and reused, and in their new contexts they still communicated the messages and practices that continued to unfold around them.



Figure 7.5 One of two statues of Dionysus from the Nymphaeum on the Upper Agora at Sagalassos.

© Sagalassos Project with kind permission.

Wrapped in a whirlwind of mentality change, pagan images maintained their ancient powers of expression as long as the sites that contained them did not lose their public function, and the social structures that supported them were not eliminated or replaced. The Christian vision of space condemned the presence of pagan statues on public land, where they could evoke ancient worship at any moment. Eusebius, Ambrose, or Prudentius actively propagated the notion that the statues decorating the places frequented by the faithful and lay people alike were potential objects of idolatry, a visual residue of dying paganism, and even cult objects. An instructive example is that of a statue of Venus in Constantinople, which stood at the Guest House of Theophilus on an elaborate column. The beauty or aesthetic nature of this statue is never mentioned. Instead, it is there to give omens:

The fixed image was, however, a testing stone for women and virgins, both rich and poor, who were suspected: when girls had lost their innocence but did not really want to admit it, their parents and friends said to them: “Let us go to the image of Aphrodite, and put your purity to the test.”

(*Patria of Constantinople* 2.65: Berger 1988, 264)

The statue was destroyed during the reign of Justinian II (565–578):

The sister-in-law of the former Kuropalat Justinian, however, destroyed the image, because her own shame was revealed in this way was when, after she had whored, she passed by on horse on the way to the Blachernae Baths, because a very strong rain fell and one could not travel any more with the imperial ships.

(*Patria of Constantinople* 2.65: Berger 1988, 264)

Patristic sources attest that the cessation of the perception of pagan statues in Constantinople as aesthetic objects (*ornamenta*) occurred between the sixth and eighth centuries. The protagonist viewers in the *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai* do not find any meaning and value in statues, but see them only as disturbing objects and remnants of the past (Bravi, in preparation), while Christian images won their own “positional meaning” (Elsner 1988; Freedberg 1982).

Images of mythical and human characters, and of inhabitants of nature in the spaces of daily life

In the cities of the Empire, myths continued to symbolize conceptual structures, daily practices, and “secular” mentalities in the rhythms of daily social life: festivals, ceremonies, and rituals celebrated *voluptas*, the full employment of sensual pleasures in the worldly existence, and they also represented actual experiences shared by the elites. We find traces of this perception in the mosaics exalting the eternal and reinvigorating value of *Apolausis* (enjoyment) in Antioch (Dunbabin 1999), or in the dances of satyrs, maenads, and Nereids around the face of the Ocean on the silverware of a noble family in Britain ([Figure 7.6](#); Painter 1977).



Figure 7.6 Silver plate from the Mildenhall Treasure. London, British Museum.

Photo: JMiall/Wikimedia Commons.

Images of well-being and the full enjoyment of worldly sensory experiences found new expressive strength in the combination of traditional themes with new meanings, which spread through churches, baths, and public places both sacred and profane. In the Church of the Apostles at Madaba, the Sea (*Thalassa*) is surrounded by sea monsters and a Dionysian procession including Achilles and Hercules (Piccirillo 1989, 134–138, and 1993, 164–165; Dunbabin 1999, 198–200). At Nebo clerics and laymen cast off earthly life and spiritual aspirations for a happy existence in the afterlife, which is imagined in the form of populated vines and acanthus scrolls, fruit trees, grazing animals, hunting scenes, grape harvest and

pressing, all decorating the church of Saints Lot and Procopius (Dunbabin 1999, 198). Scenes of hunting and countryside, shepherds and boars, and young boys and girls carrying fruit baskets feature beneath a personification of the Earth (*Ge*) in a chapel of the same village (Dunbabin 1999). Complex representations comprising mythological or allegorical figures, like Oceanus and Thetis, *Ge*, Aion, or the Karpoi, are powerful mediators between secular values and Christian religious beliefs. As late as the sixth century, John of Gaza saw the decoration, probably of some baths, that included images of *Ge*, Thalassa, and Okeanos as part of an allegory comprising personifications of nature and the heavens such as Nyx, Hesperos, the Horai, Eos, and Physis (Talgam 2008). These representations metaphorized metaphysical concepts veiled in mythical forms: the health of the civic body is elevated into the natural and cosmic order.

In areas removed from public life, such as rural villas, the cosmic principles of myth are adapted to express the dimension of time that determines the rhythms of agricultural production on the landed estates: the seasonal cycles formed part of the private universe of their *dominus*. This type of landowner is represented on a silver platter found in Cesena. Pastoral scenes run along the outer circular band, alternating with hunting scenes and separated from them by busts enclosed in medallions: a radiant Sun, seasonal and cosmic personifications. At the center of this universe, the owner of the villa sits at a banquet (Arias 1950).

Hunting scenes advertise aristocratic magnanimity. In fifth-century Antioch, a personification of Megalopsychia is surrounded by a heroic battle between wild animals and mythical hunters including Hippolytus, Adonis, Meleager, and Actaeon (Dunbabin 1999, 180; Hachili 2009, 167). The mosaics covering the living spaces of the late antique aristocracies emphasized the functions of these spaces and displayed individual characteristics as well as the *habitus* of the class to which the *dominus* belonged. Thus marked, these spaces became the stage for the *dominus* to exercise his power over his vast numbers of clients. Wild animals and hunting trips commonly symbolize wealth, status, and power (Raeck 1992), as they do in the hunting mosaic of Piazza Armerina (Muth 1999 and [Chapter 21](#), this volume). The acquisition of exotic animals from the remotest parts of the *oikoumene* visually validated the power of their owner. He was able to host sumptuous *venationes* (staged hunts), and generally exemplified models of civilization to his *sodales* and subordinates: human domination over the wild, and *civilitas* in the rural domains of the *potentiores*. In a mosaic of his villa, the *dominus* Iulius is surrounded by servants who display to him the crops of the land ([Figure 21.6](#); Grassigli 2011).

The games given to celebrate the attainment of political honors are depicted on objects of elite circulation (such as diptychs) or in mass products (ceramics, glass, mosaics, sarcophagi). The *opus sectile* (marble mosaic) from the *domus* of Junius Bassus senior, a former praetorian prefect of Constantine, memorializes his rank and largesse on the occasion of his ascent to the consulship with traditional iconography and themes from classical mythology. The depiction of Hylas and the Nymphs, for instance, is a myth with intimations of apotheosis and elite distinction due to personal virtue, while Bassus' public and "popular" rank is represented in images of games and *venationes* given on the occasion of his consulship.

Traditional iconography and subjects decorated the spaces of late antique social life with

connotations of class, individual *habitus*, and local identities. In the fifth century, the members of the elite of Carthage, contemporaries to Augustine, could adorn their homes according to pagan mythological themes without compromising their faith. In one *triclinium* (dining room), for instance, a naked statue of Ganymede abducted by the eagle of Zeus expressed the convivial values experienced in that space ([Figure 19.10](#); cf. Gazda 1981). Marble statues that decorated (possibly) a Nymphaeum in an affluent residence on the Esquiline Hill reveal deep connections of meaning consonant with ancient urban cults and aristocratic cultural models: Jupiter, Neptune, Sol, Liber Pater as a small child held by a satyr, along with Isis, Hecate, and Liber Pater, were present and alive in the religious world of the *clarissimi* in the late fourth century (Hannestad 1994; Bergmann 1999; Stirling 2005). In Chiragan, Athens, and Silahtaraga, monumental sculptures decorated various rooms with images of the gigantomachy. In the early fifth-century Athenian Agora, the façade of an aristocratic house featured colossal figures of Giants and Tritons (Frantz 1988). These figures forged a link with the imagery of the ancient Acropolis, especially with the gigantomachy of the Parthenon metopes and the heroic struggles depicted in the sculptures of the Pergamene dedications. Reliefs of the Labors of Hercules conveyed an elevated and official atmosphere in the villa at Chiragan, while statues of Aphrodite and Adonis were set in a symbolic marble landscape populated by wild boars and trees to recreate the surrounding environment of a rural villa at Montmaurin (Stirling 2005, 60, and 2007).

In some contexts, representations of myth forcefully expressed the identity of social groups characterized by commonality in their political and ideological principles. Such is a series of objects intended for aristocratic enjoyment produced in the late fourth century, probably in Rome. The image of Cybele on the Lanx of Parabiago (Musso 1983), or representations of sacrifices on the diptych of the Symmachi and Nicomachi ([Figure 7.7](#)), are seen by some modern critics as vehicles of propaganda or nostalgic reminders of a dying paganism in intellectual circles conscious of “the end” in the year of the Battle of the Frigidus (Cameron 2011). The majestic imagery of these objects (a triumphant Cybele on chariot and religious rites around the altar) represented a living conceptual reality. The image of Cybele evokes the words of Symmachus when he exhorts Nicomachus Flavianus to return to Rome for the sacred rites of Cybele, and the invectives of the *Carmen contra paganos* against the chariot of the goddess carved on silver plates (Cameron 2011). The symbolic rites represented in the diptych had the power forcefully to affirm the conception of a paganism whose heart lay in the traditional *mos* (customs), by rekindling memory and refreshing the tradition of an identity shared by the “last pagans.”



Figure 7.7 Diptych of the Symmachi and Nicomachi. Paris, Louvre, and London, Victoria and Albert Museum, inv. 212-1865.

Photo: Marsyas/Wikimedia Commons.

Religious Life: *Paideia* and Transformations of *Habitus*

In the second century, Clement of Alexandria advised Christians to distinguish themselves from ordinary citizens through images engraved on their rings:

And let our seals be either a dove, or a fish, or a ship scudding before the wind, or a musical lyre, which Polycrates used, or a ship's anchor, which Seleucus got engraved as a device; and if there be one fishing, he will remember the apostle, and the children drawn out of the water. For we are not to delineate the faces of idols, we who are prohibited to cleave to them; nor a sword, nor a bow, following as we do, peace; nor drinking-cups, being temperate.

(Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* 3.59.2; transl. Roberts-Donaldson)

The establishment of new trends in the *habitus* involved shifts in the collective imaginary. Images of religious identity displayed a tension between continuity and innovation and, in some social contexts, a versatility of symbols to express extremely different beliefs. In the religious communities of late antique Rome the funeral domain was a place of symbolic exchanges and transitions. For instance, the menorah on the Randanini sarcophagus, surrounded by common and religiously neutral Roman symbols (*putti* gathering grapes and personified victories), illustrates a diaspora identity created by contacts and commingling. On sarcophagi, lamps, gold glass, frescoes, and mosaics, flasks and chalices from catacombs, and other sacred spaces, we see a world of images populated by shepherds shouldering a lamb, *orans* figures (prayers), fishermen, and mythological and biblical figures such as Jonah, Orpheus, Abraham, Daniel, and the Apostles (Elsner 2003, 126: “cross-cultic referentialism of the Late Roman religious art”). The bucolic motif, exemplified in sarcophagi with large pastoral (e.g., Spera 2000) and paradisaical scenes (Bisconti 1990), combines terrestrial and marine elements that assume new semantic associations: the orderly nature embodies the metaphysical power that governs the Creation and spreads peace and harmony on the physical plane (Tertullian, *On Baptism* 12.7; Epiphanius *Anchoratus* 1 = PG 43; Clement, *The Instructor* 3.9.59; Bisconti 2000). In churches and catacombs the symbolic imagery of the secular domain and the pagan myths created new semantic contexts. Conventional images of mundane life formed part of new semantic sets that represented a wide and homogeneous sacred landscape.

In the late fourth century, the transposition of elements from the secular into the sacred imaginary became an obvious means to represent the Christianized elite. In the images decorating the dome of the mausoleum of Centelles, hunting scenes alternated with biblical themes: Daniel, Jonah, Noah, Lazarus, and the three Hebrews in the furnace; on the vertical axis that structures the composition, the Good Shepherd features above the traditional patron *dominus* of the hunt (Warland 2002). The life of the *dominus*, consisting of benefactions and the exercise of power in his domain, is transformed under the influence of new cultural patterns and behaviors. He is now assimilated to the Good Shepherd (also prominent in the Desenzano Villa: Grassigli 1998; Sfameni 2006), and he is surrounded by biblical characters, which are the center of the new discursive practices of power and of new models of dogmatic distinction among the Christian elite. During the sixth century, Christian symbols also decorated the silverware: on the large plates of the “Canoscio Treasure” we see the apocalyptic letters and naturalistic figures flourishing in the Christian paradise.

Images on Command: Patterns of Authority and Rhetoric in Christian Imagery

After the mid-fourth century, monuments began to show the effects of a comprehensive ideological configuration. In Rome, the formation of new figurative systems reflected the creation of values enacted by the ecclesiastical elite, now more aware of their power. The new theme of the *traditio legis* or giving of the law to Moses (Rasmussen 2001) with images of the applauding apostles is associated with ornamental motifs of lush vegetation and grape-harvesting putti. These themes link the patrons of numerous monuments erected by members of the Roman aristocracy. The tomb of St. Peter was marked by Greek marble columns decorated with vines. Harvesting putti, typical decoration of “Dionysian” artifacts and once undisputed protagonists in the funerary vocabulary of “committed pagans” (Cameron 2011), now spread over the sarcophagi and mosaics of mausolea, churches and synagogues. For Christians they become a Eucharistic metaphor for the proliferation of the Church (Ambrose, *Six Days of Creation* 3.50; John, 15.4–5).

On the sarcophagus of one of the most influential members of the Christian elite, the *praefectus urbi* Iunius Bassus who was buried in 359 in the Basilica of St. Peter after a magnificent funeral and public mourning ([Figure 7.8](#); Struthers Malbon 1990), Christ hands over the scroll of the law to Peter and Paul, and the same image features in the mausoleum of Petronius Probus and his family, located behind the apse of the basilica near St. Peter’s *martyrium* (Lizzi Testa 2004, 149).



Figure 7.8 Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, cast. Rome, Museo della Civiltà Romana.

Photo: Tetraktys/Wikimedia Commons.

Bishops replaced pagan philosophers as intellectuals and notables through their power and civic role. Based on the new power of the assemblies of the faithful who filled the churches, Ambrose was able to defend before the emperor the political influence of the bishop and the force of philosophical *parrhesia* (free speech; Brown 1992). In the Christian assemblies, *paideia* still manifested itself in the form of rhetorical homilies, but with new content for different audiences. Images decorating the churches also used a rhetoric that tended to draw on the old pagan forms. Iconophile priests were careful to balance the demands of theology and aesthetics. The artistic merit of ornaments, their being the result of great skills (*ars, techne*), was linked to the exemplary character of their subject matter. Both the form and the content of these artifacts enabled viewers to attain a deeper understanding of the reality represented (St. Nilos, *Letters* PG 79.577–580). The truth contained in the representations of martyrdoms created a set of beliefs to be cultivated in the minds of the devout and those not yet converted.

The images depicted on walls and mosaics on the ceilings and floors of churches took on multiple functions and values: they exemplified the feats of saints and martyrs, they imparted Christian dogma, and they modeled Christian *paideia* for the illiterate masses. These images also built a common identity in harmony with the content of the sermons, which in turn guided new social practices and stressed the consensus between the charitable aristocracy, the middle

classes, and the paupers. According to the bishops and preachers, the depictions of episodes from the Old and New Testaments constituted edifying *exempla* as once did the pagan images in the fora and other public spaces. Paulinus of Nola exhorted viewers to study carefully the images decorating S. Felice at Cimitile: the illiterate crowd gathered to celebrate the glory of St. Felicity was assimilated to the company of Christ represented on the walls, “while they admire the work of the saints in Christ, open to everybody’s gaze.” The splendor of artfully painted imagery “that is pleasing to the eyes,” elevated their minds to such heights that they even forgot to eat (Paulinus of Nola, *Poems* 27).

John Chrysostom urged the followers of his congregation in Antioch to imagine the blood flowing from the severed head of John the Baptist (John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the statues* 14.1 [PG 49.144]) and to visualize, as in a painting, the sufferings of Job and his wife (John Chrysostom, *Homilies on First Corinthians* 28.5 [PG 61239–61240]; Maxwell 2006).

The rhetoric of Christian images used classical models to stimulate the emotions and pathos of the viewer. At the same time, it amalgamated philosophical principles of *paideia* with new models of knowledge. The sufferings depicted in lively images constituted moral exempla and philosophical exercises that were to feature in the mansions of the rich and the minds of the poor:

Paint this parable, all of you, both rich and poor: the rich on the walls of your houses; the poor on the walls of your minds ... it will be a school for you and the foundation of all philosophy.

(John Chrysostom, *On Lazarus* 4.2 [PG 48.1008], transl. J.L. Maxwell)

Conclusion: Images in the New Centers of Power

In the world of late antiquity, Rome and Constantinople were focal points: as capitals and centers of power they spread the patterns and rules of official figurative art, and they guided the ever-increasing transformations in the urban imagery in the course of the fifth century.

In Rome, the fifth century opened with the majestic buildings of Sixtus III (432–440). The name of the pope was added to the decoration of the triumphal arch of Santa Maria Maggiore, an explicitly political affirmation in the domain of ecclesiastical power (Delogu 2000; Andaloro 2006). The church to the Virgin Mary was erected during the years of the Council of Ephesus (431). The Theotokos (Mother of God) appears on the mosaics as an image of *maiestas*, and she sits enthroned as a queen in the scene of the Annunciation. In Constantinople, too, Christian images eventually became central on the official stage. “Political” images of the Theotokos even dominated the urban landscape on the Bosphorus: Mary is invoked as a protector of the state, “the diadem of pious kings,” “the one through whom trophies are raised and the enemies fall,” and she embodied the powers once personified by Tyche and Victoria (Pentcheva 2006, 13–14).

In the siege by the Avars, Mary is described as a Homeric goddess ubiquitous on the battlefield: “the Parthenos appeared everywhere, easily defeating the enemy by instilling terror

into them ... she alone fought that battle and won it" (Theodore Synkellos, *On the Siege of Constantinople* 19.82). This image recalls Zosimus' description of Athena in 501 (5.60): "When Alaric and his army arrived in the city, he saw the tutelary goddess Athena walking along the walls, with appearance identical to that of her statue, armed and ready to resist the assault." At the end of the Iconoclastic period, narrative cycles presented the victorious, orthodox view in Christian spaces. The orthodoxy was also imposed outside of the churches, and visualized its political role to the most diverse viewers: in the *Life of Stephen the Younger* (c. 809–850), the hagiographer Stephanos Diakonos emphasized the social impact produced by the representation of official faith in public spaces. In one such place, the Milion, paintings of the six Ecumenical Councils announced the orthodox creed to those passing by, to private citizens (*idiotai*), and to foreigners.

In Rome, the political spaces essential to the life of the *civitas* disappeared or were converted into churches; this is what happened to the *Curia Senatus* and the seat of the urban prefect, while on the walls of Santa Maria Antiqua the new images commissioned by Pope John VII represented the doctrinal controversies of Byzantium in the style of Byzantine Hellenism ([Figure 7.9](#); Delogu 2000; Brenk 2004). The imagery had already undergone a profound change. The transformation of political and religious mentalities had produced a new integrated system of images, in which the modes of representation and the figurative models related to the expression of power and *auctoritas* remained, however, vital.





Figure 7.9 Santa Maria Antiqua, fresco of Maria Regina.

After: J. Wilpert, *Die römischen Mosaiken und Malereien der kirchlichen Bauten vom IV. bis zum XIII. Jhr.*, vol. 4 (Freiburg, 1916), pl. 133.

Despite the destruction and dispersion of the ancient heritage of images at the end of late antiquity, the apparatus of ornaments representing power remained unchanged. In the ninth century, an image of the Creation featured on a diptych together with Aerobindus' inauguration to the consulate, while inside the diptych of Boethius we see lists of names of seventh-century martyrs (Cutler 2007, 150).

As long as images remained pivotal items of ideological conflict, vehicles of powerful self-representation and means of expressing shared patterns of knowledge, their aesthetic and symbolic value survived religious change, and they were adapted and reinterpreted. Ancient art survived in the structural rules of western artistic production and in viewing as a societal and communicative process.

The Christian patrons perpetuated models of benefaction and self-representation, and according to bishops and preachers the images from the Old and New Testaments facilitated the diffusion of edifying examples in public spaces, as once did the pagan images in the fora and public places. The Christian truth was perceptible in the mimetic and naturalistic representations of martyrdoms. Art created a set of beliefs to be cultivated in the minds of converts and of those who had yet to be converted. As a system of structures and expression, and through its distinct ways of interacting with society, ancient art survived into the modern world.

GUIDE FOR FURTHER READING

Late antique art has long been considered a world of transition, of coexistence and/or contestation between different styles (realism vs. abstraction, plebeian art vs. classical art), art forms (sculpture vs. painting), and themes (pagan vs. Christian subjects). In the last few decades, however, critics have gone beyond these binarisms to reveal a multifocal figurative landscape and a decentralized view of the imperial world in the third to seventh centuries.

In his foundational study of late Roman art, Riegl attempted to locate the “predominant intentions of art” in a variety of material forms. He moved beyond the earlier interpretive model of crisis and rebirth, which had reduced art to a facet of the general “decline” of late antiquity. For Riegl, there were common intentions linking artworks produced between 313 and 768. In his book *Spätrömische Kunstindustrie* (1985), he described late Roman art as a world of anti-classical forms heralding modern art. Thus, he superseded Winckelmann’s theory that the death of classical art (Geulen 2002) was evident in the inability of late antique vocabularies to articulate mimetic images.

Late antique art became part of a linear process of transformation of forms marked by crises, new movements, long traditions, and discontinuity. Riegl’s concept of *Kunstwollen* opened multiple hermeneutic pathways: it surpassed the gap between “decorative” elements and meaningful artworks; late antique works of art were attributed a self-contained and aesthetically unique value. With its focus on the viewer, *Kunstwollen* is also the first hermeneutic model useful for investigating the contextual relationship between works, their audiences, and the world of aesthetic perception.

On the chronological boundaries and aesthetic theories applied to art in late antiquity see Riegl (1985), Elsner (2002), Panofsky (1920/1981 and 1925/2008). On ancient interpretations of style: Rodenwaldt (1944–1945). On late antique art, plebeian art, and local visual cultures: Bianchi Bandinelli (1971). On new interpretive perspectives: Elsner (2004). Recent trends tend to expand late antique art geographically and chronologically to include the cultures of “barbarians,” Copts, and Persians, and by emphasizing the role of cultural patterns, political categories, and styles of figurative models in Rome, Ravenna, Byzantium, and other production centers; see the various contributions in Hoffman (2007).

On the late antique viewer and the characteristics of aesthetic perception, see Elsner (1995, 2003, and 2007). For the figurative imaginary between continuity and rupture, cf. Mathews (1993), Bisconti (2000 and 2007), Andaloro (2006). On the ideological vs. religious meanings of mythological representations: Musso (1983), Painter (1977 and 1999), Leader-Newby (2004), Cameron (2011), [Chapter 19](#) on art in Lizzi Testa (2013).

On sculpture generally: Hannestad (1994), Bergmann (1999), Stirling (2005), Bauer and Witschel (2007), Smith (2007), Mägele (2011); for the Arch of Constantine: Elsner (2000 and 2006), Kleiner (2003); for sarcophagi: Ramsey (1983), Struthers Malbon (1990), Brandenburg (2002), Koch (2002), Bisconti (2007), Borg (2013); on portraits: Smith (1997), La Rocca (2000).

Given the wide thematic variety of diptychs, it is difficult to establish their function. Their symbolic capital, however, and their role in the relationship between the commissioner and his

audience are clear enough: Olovsson (2005), Eastmond (2010).

On mosaics: Lancha (1997), Dunbabin (1999), Bowersock (2006), Hachili (2009); on images in public and urban context: Curran (1994), Ensoli and La Rocca (2000), Nordhagen (2000), Bassett (2004), Bravi (2012, 2014, and in preparation); on changes in the topography of late antiquity: Frantz (1988), Delogu (2000), Lavan (2001), Meneghini and Santangeli Valenzani (2004), Delogu and Gasparri (2007), Lavan, Swift, and Putzeys (2008), Lavan and Mulryan (2011).

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PART III

Producing and Commissioning Roman Art

CHAPTER 8

Technique and Message in Roman Art

Mont Allen

This discussion of technique and message in Roman art must begin with a caveat: we are not talking about style. Admittedly, attempting to decouple the two concepts is not always easy, largely because “style” itself is a notoriously tricky term to pin down, with a semantic range that occasionally seems ready to engulf all. At the smallest scale of application, it can refer to an individual artist’s own personal approach to form, his or her signature handling of lines and planes, whether “limp” or “rigid,” “impressionistic” or “precise,” “fluid” or “academic.” (One notices how metaphorical and vague the adjectives applied often are.) At larger scales, “style” serves as a shorthand for describing entire constellations of formal and compositional features, extending across hundreds and thousands of objects, which nonetheless cluster together within particular geographical and chronological bounds. These we call national or regional styles (Italic, Cyprian, East Greek, and so on) and period styles (archaic, classical, and so on). Sometimes these constellations further coalesce around certain kinds of objects or subject matter, in which case we talk of generic (i.e., genre-specific) styles. A good example is the veristic style, a form of hyper-realism emphasizing physical flaws and signs of age, typically identified with certain kinds of Roman portraiture. Or these constellations may be felt to map onto social rank, or degree of cultural integration, leading to discussions of “plebeian” style, “provincial” style, and so on.

Occasionally the word is pressed so far as to seem downright out of place. A good example lies in the so-called four Pompeian styles of wall painting: since these describe period-specific decorative programs, it would seem more natural to call them the four Pompeian “schemes” or “ensembles” instead. Other versions of the concept have come under pressure too, particularly those operating at the largest scale. The notion of period style remains a useful conceptual tool if not pressed too far, particularly for the study of Greek art (perhaps less so for Roman). However, the quest to identify essential national styles, each conceived as the single and unified expression of a nation’s spirit—a quest that occupied many scholars of Roman art during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including Wickhoff and Strzygowski, Sieveking and Schober, and (in modified form) Furtwängler and Rodenwaldt—has been largely discredited.

Yet despite the vast semantic range of the term, the extreme haziness of its borders, and the excesses of its application, we do intuit what lies at its center. *Style* as a concept refers above all to form and composition. It concerns modes of arranging lines, planes, and colors, and to the organization of such forms within the whole.

Technique, in contrast, relates directly to an object’s facture. It encompasses the physical substrate, the raw material, from which an object is made; but also the tools and processes through which it is made, and the tangible traces that these leave behind. Unlike the idea of

style, which constantly threatens to shake loose its body and dematerialize into ethereal abstraction, technique remains firmly embedded in the physical fabric of an object.

We have become increasingly aware that Romans could attach symbolic value to style. What Otto Brendel first suggested half a century ago (Brendel 1979/1953) is now commonly accepted: that Roman art's "eclecticism" in matters of style was not random, but purposeful, and followed a governing logic. Whether faced with Augustus' particular use of classicizing style to project claims of peace and stability (Zanker 1988), or the general and far-reaching set of conventions by which Romans assigned the different styles at their disposal to various classes of imagery and subject matter (Hölscher 2004), it is now clear that style in Roman art frequently bore semantic weight. Less well known, however, is that in Roman eyes and hands, the same was true for technique.

Here the traditional art-historical preoccupation with iconography threatens to leave us near-sighted. Owing to the formative influence of scholars such as Erwin Panofsky (who died in 1968) and others who fundamentally shaped the modern discipline of art history, questions of iconography—those standardized elements of subject matter carrying symbolic meaning—continue to occupy a privileged position in our study of what objects mean and how. The problem is that when images are assumed to proclaim their messages primarily through iconography, then material facture and technique are excluded, a priori, from the domain of signification at all. If we limit meaning to the "what" of what is shown—to what falls under the heading of subject matter or content—and reduce technique to its neutral and passive instrument, the possibility that material facture might actively signify or create meaning is foreclosed in advance. We must be wary, then, of considering solely iconography.

We must also be wary of inadvertently importing certain tenets of modernism, lest they cloud our vision. The concept of truth to material is the most obstructive here. As formulated by twentieth-century artists and critics such as Roger Fry and Henry Moore, given prominence through the Arts and Crafts movement, and enshrined in the International Style in architecture, it describes the belief that materials should be used in ways that foreground their own nature and reveal their own particular qualities. Admittedly, few now would consider themselves full-blown proponents of these movements. Nevertheless, a vague notion of truth to material is simply part of our contemporary cultural consciousness, a legacy of our modernist heritage, and it continues to inform our aesthetic assumptions. Any Roman or Greek artist would find it utterly alien. The problem lies in how it constricts the semantic fluidity of technique. The idea that materials have some innate quality yearning for expression makes it difficult for one to appreciate the huge range of *other* associations that they may carry. To put it bluntly, as long as we think that art can and should express the nature (whatever we imagine that to be) of its materials, we do not imagine materials expressing much of anything else. The concept of truth to material is thus the first thing that we must jettison.

Perhaps because of such preconceptions, the study of the intersection of technique and meaning in ancient art is in its infancy. Individual studies have addressed scattered instances, but these typically take the form of isolated observations. There has been little systematic mapping. Adding the various pieces together, however, may give us a glimpse into the extent of the

phenomenon. Were Roman artists and viewers, and Greeks before them, capable of according technique itself a meaning-bearing load? Did they ever deploy it as a system of signification? We will find that they did—and, moreover, that they did so repeatedly, in wildly divergent genres and in multiple media, across the Mediterranean world, and spanning most of the temporal range of production, from archaic Greek art of the sixth century BCE to late imperial Roman art of the fourth century CE. We are dealing, it turns out, with a fundamental dimension of ancient image-making.

We can identify two different modes through which material facture communicated in Roman hands. The first we might call the straightforwardly *associative* or *symbolic* mode. In this, the material or technique came culturally pre-packaged, as it were, with one or more widely recognized associations. That is not to say that these associations were inherent to the material in any ultimate sense. They were, of course, culturally assigned. However, we can call them inherent in a weak sense, insofar as they could be expected to come to mind (be “activated”) automatically whenever that material or technique was encountered in a certain artistic context. This differs from the second, which we might call the *relational* mode. In this, two techniques were juxtaposed in a single work of art in order to activate a set of associations that neither carried in isolation. Here it was the explicit mutual contrast between techniques that set signification in motion: the viewer actively perceived that meaning derived from neither automatically, but only arose in the interstices between them.

The first mode was the more common in Roman art. Because it relies on associations directly identified with the material or technique itself, it is more obvious, and makes a greater appearance in our sources. Its instances are thus easier to document and enumerate, and it is with them that we will begin.

Manifest Cost of Materials

Perhaps most obviously, all materials used in Roman art carried monetary—which is thus to say, social—value, depending on the cost of procuring them. As moderns conditioned by the modern art market, it is particularly easy for us to overlook this, because the cost of the raw materials involved makes up such a small percentage of any contemporary work of art. Thanks to the global economic order, we enjoy unprecedentedly low costs of extraction and transport of raw materials, while the cost of artistic “genius” can be astonishingly high. As a result, only the most minimal part of a contemporary artwork’s market value reflects the cost of its fabric. This is worlds apart from the status of art objects in the ancient world (Boardman 1987, 293). In ancient Rome, as in most pre-industrialized societies, the sheer cost of materials often made up the largest part of their value, particularly in the domain of bronze and marble sculpture (less so for painting on pottery and walls, where the fabric was either relatively cheap or pre-given).

So expensive was overland transport of marble, for example, that certain types of stone were prohibitively expensive for those living in towns without easy maritime or riparian access. Sagalassos, a Greek and then Roman city in what is now southwest Turkey, serves as a stark

reminder. It existed within the regional orbit of Attaleia (present-day Antalya). However, while Attaleia enjoyed a coastal location, Sagalassos lay not only 100 kilometers inland, but 1,500 meters higher. This imposed severe restrictions on what patrons could afford to have imported. Thus, while sarcophagi carved of Pentelic and Proconnesian marble (from Attica and the Sea of Marmara, respectively) have been found in great numbers in Attaleia, reflecting the city's enviable access to cheap sea-borne transport, excavations at Termessos, 30 kilometers inland between Attaleia and Sagalassos, have turned up only a single example of a Pentelic sarcophagus, while Sagalassos itself has yielded no trace whatsoever of either Pentelic or Proconnesian pieces (Waelkens 2002, 374). In other cases the immense cost of artistic materials reflected not the time and labor required to transport them, but that to extract them in the first place. This was the case with the most recognizable and desirable pigments, such as malachite, azurite, cinnabar, and Egyptian blue, all of which were worth their weight in gold (Bradley 2009, 438).

With so much of an artwork's value tied directly to the cost of extraction and transportation, it is no wonder that Roman viewers paid so much attention to material. Pliny the Elder serves as a typical voice here: when discussing works of art in his *Natural History*, he frequently cites the prices paid for them (Isager 1991, 38; Schoder 1968, B). Whether discussing the price of purple pigment (*Natural History* 9.137) or grandiose works in bronze, such as the Colossus of Rhodes (*Natural History* 34.41–42), Pliny displays a keen interest in what art costs—cranky, given his old-fashioned reservations about luxury (Wallace-Hadrill 1990), but keen nonetheless. And for our purposes note that, when reporting prices, it is above all to the value of the *materials* involved that Pliny refers. His concern as a natural historian for nature's products doubtless informs his interest in what artistic media cost, lending it a little extra spiciness, but we should not think him eccentric for paying such attention in the first place. Pliny's awareness of the relative cost of materials is simply a focused example of an awareness that we know Romans in general brought to bear on artworks. As a result, even casual Roman viewers were better equipped than we are to guess roughly about the value of a given piece of contemporary art, based simply on attention paid to its physical fabric. Correspondingly—and this is the most substantial point—this means that Roman art served far better than ours directly to proclaim the social status of its owner. Despite the aura surrounding it in some circles, art is actually a very poor means of displaying one's wealth in our own society: only the guest who possesses enough art-historical knowledge to differentiate a Pollock from the scribbles of a chimpanzee, or a rare Melanesian mask from a home-brewed Halloween accessory, will be sufficiently impressed. In contrast, any Roman visitor able to glean the glimmer of gilding, perceive the sheen of bronze, recognize inlays in precious stones, or differentiate marble from limestone in the house of his host will already be sufficiently equipped to know that he is viewing something precious, and to make a good initial guess as to its rough value. Given how emphatically both the Roman house (Zanker 1998, 134–203) and Roman public space (Hölscher 1984) were devoted to displaying status in terms easily understood by all, this must have been a major factor in art's social appeal. On these grounds alone, then, it is fair to say that art was far more socially *functional* in the Roman world than in our own, because the value of materials ensured that art's indexical relationship to wealth was more manifest.

What I have just outlined about the manifest value of materials sometimes applied to the techniques for working them as well, particularly when the same material could be fashioned in one of several mutually exclusive techniques. This was the case with carved gemstones, particularly sardonyx (also known as banded agate), which was equally suitable for making both cameos and intaglios. Cameos were the harder to carve well, because of the technical requirements: both cameos and intaglios were carved with the help of a stationary rotating lathe equipped with cutting wheels, but the convex form of cameos presented much less surface area to these wheels than the concave form of intaglios, guaranteeing that their production was considerably more fraught—and their value correspondingly higher (Lapatin 2010; cf. Lapatin, [Chapter 17](#), this volume), as their imagery attests. (Cameos feature disproportionately more royal/imperial imagery than do intaglios; cf. [Figure 10.8](#).) Simple identification of the technique used to sculpt a gemstone could thus speak volumes about its social value.

Magical and Medicinal Properties

Beyond the purely fiscal and social, however, artistic materials could bear a wide variety of other cultural associations, many of which we are prone to overlook because they so exceed the relatively limited range of associations carried by such materials in our own contemporary elite culture. Nothing better exemplifies this gulf than the potent magical and medicinal properties that gems and other stones in particular carried in the Roman imagination. Pliny's chapters in the *Natural History* devoted to these materials (36–37) are absolutely overflowing with lists of such marvelous properties and fabulous powers. We learn—just to cite four of dozens on dozens of such examples—that eagle stones, when wrapped in the skins of sacrificed animals, prevent miscarriage and uterine prolapse (*Natural History* 36.151). Jet, when kindled, produces fumes that seek out and apprehend those simulating illness or virginity (*Natural History* 36.142). The runaway stone (*lapis fugitivus*) constantly keeps wandering off whenever it has a mind to, and so has to be tied down with lead (*Natural History* 36.99). And serpentine possesses the power to relieve headaches and snakebites (*Natural History* 36.56). We might wish that there were more overlap between the stones whose miraculous powers Pliny relates and those commonly employed for sculpture, such as the various white marbles. Serpentine, however, did find limited use in statuary—an especially fine example is the “portrait” of a hound in the Capitoline, a Roman copy of a Greek original from the fourth century BCE—as well as for paving expensive floors (Borghini 2004, 291). Given its ability to alleviate headaches and snakebites, nothing would be more appropriate than to find it used for statues of Asclepius or Hygieia. Sadly, though, the number of extant sculptures in serpentine is too small to allow for any such generalizations. Given the particularly dense network of powers surrounding gems, however, it seems likely that the gems and other stones used as sculptural inlays could have been chosen for their magical and other symbolic properties as much as their aesthetic ones.

Geographical Associations: Origin and Empire

Less strange to us, perhaps, but still unexpected, are the territorial associations that materials

carried, depending on where they were quarried. One might have thought that Roman viewers would hardly know where a given stone came from, let alone care. Pliny corrects us. For he clearly holds familiarity with the various kinds of colored stones, marble and otherwise, to be common knowledge—including awareness of their geographical origin. As he puts it,

It is not important to mention the colors and species of marbles when they are so well known, nor is it easy to list them when they are so numerous. For there are few places for which a characteristic marble is not found to exist.

(*Natural History* 36.55)

Any remaining doubts that we might have about such territorial associations disappear when we turn to the objects, for it is clear that Roman carvers occasionally harnessed these associations when matching stone to subject matter. Perhaps the best example is pavonazzetto, also called Dokimeian or Afyon marble, because it was quarried near the ancient city of Dokimeion/Docimium in Phrygia (the modern province of Afyon, Turkey). Its striking reddish veins verging on purple had already received a geographically appropriate explanation—they were stains from the blood shed by no greater a Phrygian than Attis himself (Fox 1987, 41)—and the stone was clearly exploited by Roman sculptors for its Phrygian connections. So when pavonazzetto was used for the Hanging Marsyas in the Capitoline Museum, its bloody violet splotches vividly evoking the victim's flayed flesh (Claridge 2010, 468), it also underscored the satyr's own Phrygian origin: both Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 6.399–400) and Herodotus (*Histories* 7.26) explain that the river Marsyas in Phrygia was named after him, and Herodotus goes on to note that the Phrygian town of Kelainai/Celaenae, situated where the Marsyas joins the Meander, still displayed his flayed skin. The same regional association explains why Ganymede alone of the Sperlonga sculptures was hewn from pavonazzetto (Ridgway 2000, 80), when the others were all carved from white marble: as a prince of Troy (Homer, *Iliad* 5.265), abducted by Zeus from nearby Mount Ida, Ganymede's Phrygian identity was a given. Ovid refers to him as "Phrygian Ganymede" (*Metamorphoses* 10.155) and Statius calls him the "Phrygian hunter" (*Thebaid* 1.549). The choice of Phrygian marble thus underscored his mythological identity, with material echoing subject matter. The same logic informs the astonishing pair of kneeling barbarians in the Naples Museum, carved from pavonazzetto in the first century ([Figure 8.1](#)). (Their faces and hands, in *nero antico*, are modern.) To mark their identity as eastern, the artist gave them the distinctive Phrygian headdress. However, as additional insurance that his audience would not miss the point, he underlined it further through facture, broadcasting their origin through Phrygian marble.



Figure 8.1 Pavonazzetto statue of Eastern barbarian, c. 10 CE. Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. 6117.

Photo: Mont Allen.

Other stones were similarly exploited for their geographical connections. Pliny, for example, tells us (*Natural History* 36.58) that a huge statue of the Nile and his 16 children, sculpted in Egyptian “basanite”—more accurately bekhen stone, the dark metallic green greywacke from the Wadi Hammamat—was dedicated (and perhaps commissioned; the Latin is ambiguous) by Vespasian for his Temple of Peace.

In all these cases, then, Roman sculptors matched stones to subject matter felt to share a common geography, counting on the materials’ ability to activate a desired set of territorial associations. By extension, it was precisely through their collective power to evoke specific locales that an international variety of stones, showcased in one place, could proclaim the sweep of empire. The imperial Baths of Caracalla are an impressive example. Employing Proconnesian marble for its main architectural elements, and Pentelic for its figural friezes, complemented by column shafts made of both red and black syenite (from ancient Syene, modern Aswan, in Egypt), black-and-white speckled *granito del foro* (from the imperial quarries at Mons Claudianus, in eastern Egypt), and grey-green dacite granite (from the Roman province of Dacia, modern Romania; Bruno 2002a, 296–297), all offset by veneer slabs from dozens of other quarries spanning three continents (DeLaine 1997, 85–102), Caracalla’s *thermae* were designed to present the bather with a single retina-searing résumé of the empire’s vast territorial extent, condensed and crystallized in stone.

In all of this, the state played an important role in maintaining the conceptual links between materials and their places of origin, thanks to the centralized bureaucratic efforts of the Roman *ratio marmorum*, the imperial “marble bureau” responsible for directly administering certain quarries under imperial control (as at Mons Claudianus; Peacock 1994), imposing quotas and placing orders with other quarries under municipal or private control, organizing transport and distribution of the stone, and maintaining stockpiles at Rome and various regional centers of ready-to-carve blocks that could be tapped as projects arose. The *ratio marmorum* was first established under Augustus himself, to ensure an adequate supply of Carrara marble for his building projects (Bruno 2002a, 290–291). It was therefore a direct child of the Principate, and its operations expanded with Roman *imperium*: as ever more new quarries were opened, old ones previously under private operation were reorganized, and all were increasingly integrated under imperial auspices. Thus, while Augustus’ efforts had concentrated on Carrara and certain colored marbles, the imperial exploitation of Proconnesian marble, and *bigio antico* from Lesbos, seems to have begun under Nero (Bruno 2002b, 282, 285); Pentelic first became truly widely available for everyday projects under the Flavians (Bruno 2002a, 292–293); *Mons Claudianus* granite, syenite from Syene (Aswan), pavonazzetto from Dokimeion, and *Africano* seem to have entered imperial orbit under Trajan and Hadrian (Bruno 2002a, 293); and Thasian marble, while used for select sarcophagi in the Antonine period (Herrmann 1990, 87), only came to see widespread use in the third century (Walker 1990, 131–132), especially under the Tetrarchy (Bruno 2002a, 298). With the state playing so crucial a role in

orchestrating the availability of such stones, it is little wonder that Roman viewers could possess a keen awareness of many stones' geographical origins, and of the reach of Empire proclaimed through their collective assemblage.

Approximating Other Media

To the list of associations harnessed by Roman artists we can add others. In some cases, for example, we find materials exploited for their visual and symbolic similarity to *other* artistic materials, in a kind of second-order representation. Here, the material or technique in question is chosen for its optical proximity to another; as a proxy, it can then adopt the voice of the original, and participate in the same semantic web. Good Greek precedent exists. One example comes from Hellenistic Rhodes, where local stones (dark gray limestone and red limestone) were chosen for cult images in the island's Temple of Isis due to their superficial similarity to the black and red Egyptian granites that the goddess preferred (Gregarek 2002, 206). Here, then, visual continuity with other stones allowed the local ones to adopt a foreign geographical valence, and a context-specific religious charge, which they could never have carried otherwise. Roman artists employed the same strategy—and often in a similar context, for it is above all Egyptian stones that we find so imitated. Thus, dark Italian marbles were used for the sculptures in the Iseum in Benevento, evoking the dark granites familiar from Egypt. Similarly, mottled black *bigio antico* (from the Aegean fringe of Asia Minor) and the nearly fully black *nero antico* (from Tunisia) were employed for the scene-setting Egyptianizing statues in the Canopus at Hadrian's Villa (Gregarek 2002, 208–209). And by the same logic of geographical color association, the dark *bigio antico* was used for the statue of a reclining Nile now in the Vatican (Bieber 1977, 34, fig. 64; Gregarek 2002, fig. 6). This pattern shows how strongly Romans imagined certain stones to be typical of certain locales—and then employed *other* stones, more easily obtained and worked, to act as visual surrogates when it was felt that the subject matter should be reinforced through presentation in a certain material.

Mimesis versus Metonymy

Occasionally we find materials pressed into service for their ability to evoke the appearance of other materials—not (as earlier) that of other sculptural media, but rather of substances associated with the subject matter depicted, or, in certain cases, the subject matter itself. Color was the most central factor here, and, as so often, Greek precedent existed. At the most basic level, this could take the form of simple mimesis. If bronze was especially attractive for statuary, the reason lay largely in its obvious resemblance to tanned human skin. It has been argued, by extension, that much of the allure of the dark *nero antico*, *bigio antico*, and *bigio morato* for statuary in the Roman period reflected the fact that their color would have evoked old, already patinated bronze (Gregarek 2002, 212; Vermeule 1996, 819). If the argument holds, we are dealing with a form of second- or even third-order allure: dark stones are attractive because they resemble patinated bronze, attractive because it recalls fresh bronze, attractive because it resembles tanned skin. It is not clear, however, to what extent Romans

tolerated patination or would have found it attractive. In any case, the common practice of inlaying the eyes of bronze statues with gems, glass, ivory, enamel, or colored marbles, and picking out select anatomical features in other metals (such as red copper for lips, or silver for teeth), certainly spoke to mimetic desire (Bradley 2009, 430), as did the ubiquitous habit of painting white marble statues. And for similarly mimetic reasons, we can understand why a stone like cipollino—a light green marble with veins of darker green, occasionally also pink and yellow, quarried in Karystos in southeastern Euboea—was used for the delightful crocodile prowling the Canopus at Hadrian's Villa (Strong 1976, 204–205), its hue suggesting “the slimy, weedy skin” of the real reptile (Vermeule 1996, 824).

More interesting, however, are cases in which materials and techniques were chosen not for any *mimetic* relationship to the subject matter, but for their *metonymic*—less often synecdochic—relationship, through resemblance to some other substance or property associated with the subject matter. As we might expect, there was Greek precedent. It has been argued, for example, that the distinctive white-ground technique so closely connected with lekythoi was not incidental to their subject matter, but rather intimately tied to it. Women were white in Greek art, to borrow the phrasing, traditionally shown with skin much lighter than that of men. And lekythoi themselves were largely intended for a female clientele, as reflected in the specific repertoire of scenes chosen to decorate them, calculated to speak to a female audience. The white-ground technique may thus have been pressed into service for this class of vessels because its own color in this context would have carried feminine associations (Neils 2008). This represents yet another mode through which technique could bear a symbolic load, harnessed to complement and underscore the significance of the subject matter.

Roman artists worked in the metonymic mode extensively. Hence *rosso antico*, a marble from Cape Tainaron/Matapan, the southernmost point of the Peloponnese, was popular for rendering the male members of the Dionysiac retinue—Sileni, Pans, centaurs, and especially satyrs—because its vivid red cast recalled that of wine (Borghini 2004, 288; Strong 1976, 204). Examples are widespread. We might think of the *rosso antico* herm bust of a Silenus in the Baia Museum ([Figure 8.2](#)), the Pan from Roman Pergamon now in Berlin (Marquardt 1995, pl. 1.4), the mask of Pan sporting a pine wreath in the British Museum, the torso of a *rosso antico* centaur in the Metropolitan Museum ([Figure 8.3](#)), or the busts of satyrs in the same material in the Vatican and the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek (Gregarek 2002, fig. 4). For rendering Dionysus himself, however, *giallo antico* was preferred. Quarried near Symitthus, modern Chemtou, in Tunisia (Cancelliere 2002, 303), its color ranged from creamy yellow through orange, occasionally verging on red. This made it ideal for the god whose characteristic costume was a saffron-colored tunic. In the opening lines of Aristophanes's *Frogs*, for instance, Dionysus enters wearing his normal saffron robe (here comically accessorized with Herakles's lion skin), while later in the play, Herakles himself makes fun of Dionysus for his effeminate saffron silks (*Frogs* 42–56). Ovid too associates that product of the crocus with the deity's manifestation, as when the revelation of his power to the daughters of Minyas is accompanied by the sweet scent of saffron (*Metamorphoses* 4.393). And as lord of theater, his connection with saffron was extended directly onto the stage itself: Lucretius tells us that it was routinely sprinkled or bathed with precious Cilician saffron (*scena croco Cilici perfusa recens est: On*

the Nature of Things 2.416), and Propertius confirms that the scent of saffron marked the stage (*Elegies* 4.1.6). Little wonder, then, that we find the orangish-yellow *giallo antico* regularly employed in metonymic fashion for this god of the crocus. A good example is the herm bust of Dionysus residing in the Museo Nazionale Romano (Anderson 1989, 76, cat. 90).

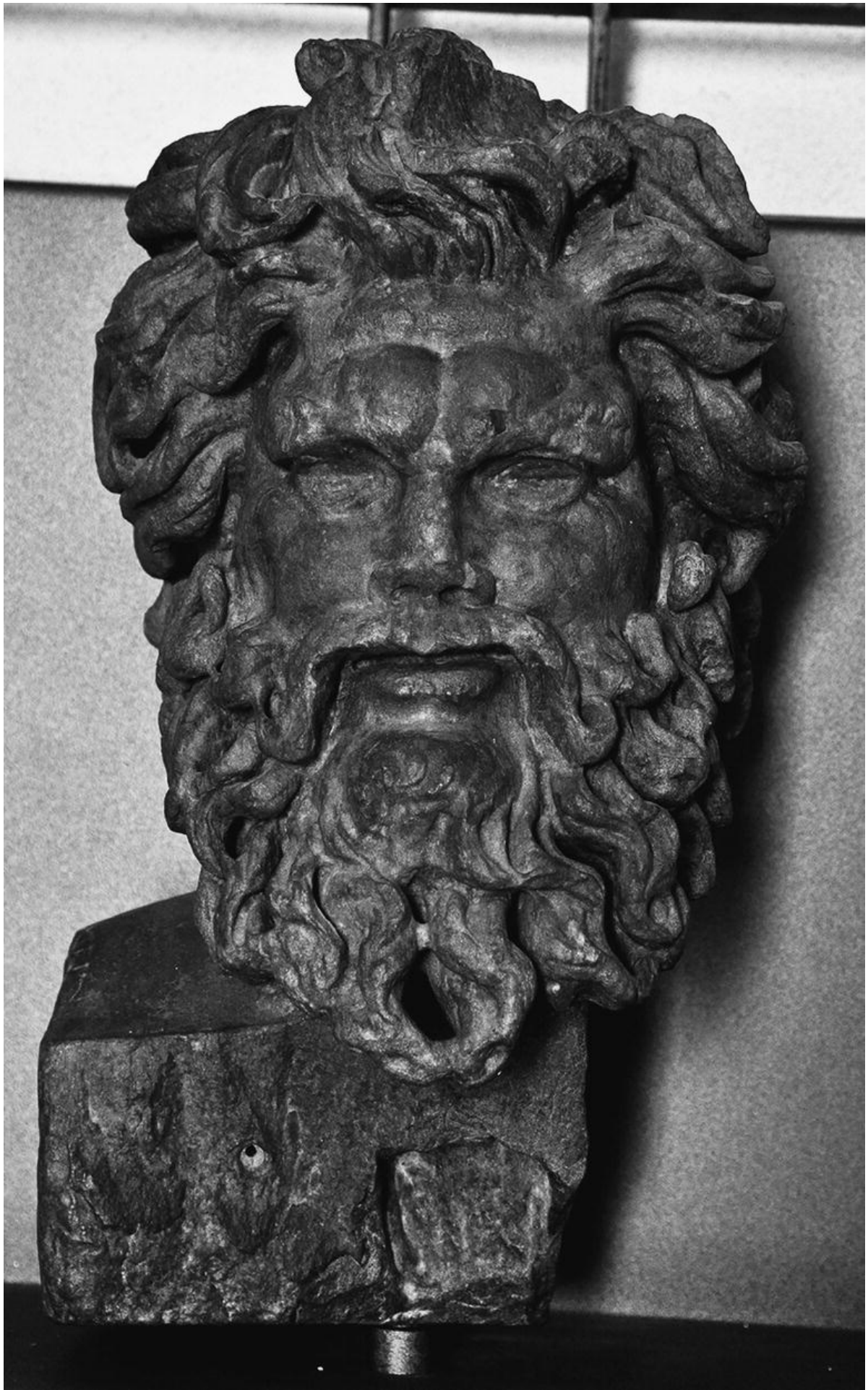


Figure 8.2 Rosso antico bust of Silenus, c. 100 CE. Baia, Museum, inv. 317959.

Photo: Mont Allen.



Figure 8.3 Rosso antico torso of centaur, first century CE. New York, Metropolitan Museum, inv. 09.221.6.

Photo: Mont Allen.

Another such metonym explored by Roman carvers centered on porphyry, a deep reddish-purple stone quarried at Mons Porphyrites (the modern Gebel Dokhan) in Egypt's parched eastern mountains. Exploitation and export to Rome began under Claudius and seems to have continued under Nero. (Suetonius tells us that Nero, as decadent in death as in life, was buried in a container of "porphyritic marble"; *Lives of the Caesars: Nero* 50.) Quarrying lapsed thereafter, however (Borghini 2004, 274), and did not resume until the reign of Trajan, when the stone came into vogue (Strong 1976, 204). Its popularity only grew under succeeding emperors, reaching a zenith under the Tetrarchy, when it was used for complete sculptural ensembles, and continuing well into the fourth century. Given that the color designated by the Latin *purpura* occupied a chromatic range closer to crimson (our "purple" is blue-shifted relative to the Romans'), and given that it was early reserved for the clothing of aristocrats and magistrates, and later associated with imperial rank, it is understandable why this reddish-purple stone was widely utilized for imagery connected with rulers. Examples include the famous group portrait in porphyry of the four Tetrarchs, originally from Constantinople but now in Venice (Kleiner 2007, 278, [fig. 19.1](#)), and the porphyry sarcophagus of Constantine's mother Helena, now in the Vatican ([Figure 8.4](#)). Clearly, the significance and message of such objects for the Roman viewer did not rest solely in their iconographical content, but also in the very material used to render such works. Here the stone itself activated a set of associations—in this case, princely associations—that artists pressed into service to underscore the imperial nature of what was depicted.



Figure 8.4 Porphyry sarcophagus of Constantine's mother Helena, c. 335 CE. Rome, Vatican Museum, Museo Pio-Clementino, inv. 238.

Photo: Mont Allen.

A caveat before continuing. While the pattern of use of the colored stones discussed reveals that they could carry particular semiotic charges, we should not think that this held for all colored marbles. *Bigio morato*, for example—a black marble with white swirls, quarried, like *rosso antico*, at Cape Tainaron/Matapan in Greece—was employed for high-quality statues of figures ranging from gods (Jupiter and Asclepius) and mythological beasts (Centaur) to imprisoned kings and Dacian barbarians (Borghini 2004, 160). It is very difficult to ascertain any thematic continuity between such wildly different subjects, making it likely that *bigio morato* possessed little semantic content beyond proclaiming the means of the owner.

Historical Associations: Evoking Tradition

Finally, materials could carry *historical* associations when used in particular contexts, and, through that, proclaim certain cultural values. Perhaps the best example is the use of terracotta for architectural elements and large-scale sculpture. If Greek sculptors preferred stone here, the traditional material in central and northern Italy was clay, with extensive Etruscan precedent. The reasons largely reflected local Italian geology: the paucity of hard stones sufficiently fine-grained to take a high polish. The Carrara quarries are a notable exception, but they seem not to have been discovered until the third century BCE, and their inland inaccessibility limited their use (Grossman 2003). The great Etruscan centers such as Vulci, Chiusi, Fiesole, and Volterra had to rely on local limestone, *nenfro*, travertine, or tuff if they wanted stone. Their rough, friable surface did not take detail well, and was suitable for neither polishing nor painting. Mud brick thus remained a common building material, even for temples; and even when walls were made of tuff or other stone, terracotta maintained its status as the sculptural medium of choice (Haynes 2000, 214–215). Romans of the early and middle Republic inherited the same constraints, and built and carved in the same manner. Rising Roman power, however, changed this; and if the conquest of the Greek east saw a flood of looted objects pour into Rome, it also provided access to new materials.

The first Roman temples to be built in marble, such as the Temple of Vesta near the Tiber or the Temple of Hercules Victor, followed on the heels of these conquests—the latter was likely built by Mummius on his triumphant return from Corinth (Kleiner 2007, 10)—and sculpture followed suit. Yet, even after a century of imperial building projects had erected scores of gleaming marble and marble-clad temples and sculptural ensembles, transforming the face of the city, many of the old tuff shrines and their terracotta sculpture remained (Pliny, *Natural History* 35.158). That they were indeed perceived to be old—and their materials mentally mapped in terms of venerable antiquity—is confirmed by Pliny. He ascribes the very introduction of modeling in clay in Italy to an Etruscan (*Natural History* 35.152), notes that this art was brought to perfection in Etruria (*Natural History* 35.157), reminds us that even cult statues of the gods (*deorum simulacra*) were made of wood or terracotta before the conquest of Asia (*Natural History* 34.34), and ascribes the establishment of a guild for those working in clay to King Numa himself (*Natural History* 35.159–160), which is to say, he grounds this art in hallowed antiquity. Some found these old images in terracotta risibly old-fashioned, as Pliny's crusty retort in defense of their value (*Natural History* 35.157–158) or the words that Livy puts in Cato's mouth complaining that they were despised in his time (Livy, *History of Rome* 34.4.4) make plain. Others surely shared Livy's and Pliny's respect for them.

However, whether viewers found them laughable or laudable, it is clear that sculpture in this material awakened associations with the past, the traditional, the simple, and, depending on one's attitude, the uncorrupted. It could thus be pressed into service quite calculatedly when one wanted to advertise such virtues and claim them for oneself—as when Augustus early in his reign revived works in clay as part of a comprehensive program designed to appeal to traditional values (Hallett 2011), of which the large sequence of terracotta plaques that he commissioned for his own Temple of Apollo Palatinus (Hallett 2011, figs. 14–16), the

extensive series of lifesize terracotta statues that he placed in his Palatine residence, including an astonishing head of Apollo (Hallett 2011, fig. 20), and numerous other Augustan terracotta plaques and temple antefixes—such as the splendid one in the Metropolitan Museum showing Venus and Mars ([Figure 8.5](#))—are some of the most notable examples.



Figure 8.5 Terracotta Augustan temple antefix, c. 10 BCE. New York, Metropolitan Museum, inv. 96.18.162.

Photo: Mont Allen.

Contrasts in Fabric: Bichrome Statuary

So far we have treated the straightforwardly associative or symbolic mode through which material facture could communicate in Roman hands. It is time now to turn to that other mode mentioned at the beginning, the *relational*, which consciously juxtaposes two techniques in a single work in order to activate associations that neither carries in isolation.

As expected, we can count on Greek precedent. Both acrolithic sculptures, which used marble only for the head and exposed body parts, and chryselephantine (gold and ivory) ones, such as Pheidias's Athena Parthenos, juxtaposed mutually contrasting techniques (Lapatin 2001), although whether for semiotic purposes over and above their hieratic aesthetic effect is less clear. There are other cases, however, where we are left with no doubt. The Parthenon frieze itself offers one such example. While interpretations of the frieze appear endless, missing has been a consideration of facture, in particular the Parthenon's extensive use of bronze attachments to render the bridles and reins of the horses. Such conspicuous use of flashy metal seems all the more striking when the viewer turns to the frieze's sacrificial heifers, for in stark contrast to their equine counterparts, the leads and halters of the cattle were rendered not in glittering bronze, but simple paint. This becomes significant in light of crucial data provided by Pindar, Pausanias, and Corinthian coinage, which relate that Athena herself invented the horse bridle, and even received cult on this account. By isolating the reins and bridles of the horses in bronze, then, the Parthenon foregrounds the goddess's own civilizing gift. This in turn forces us to reframe the prominence of cavalcade and chariot race in the frieze itself. Rather than relegating them to ancillary status as vehicles for some *other* subject (whether celebration of the Panathenaia, commemoration of Marathon, and so on), we must consider that Athena's bridled horse *is* the frieze's primary subject—a subject that we have overlooked because it was picked out and proclaimed not through iconography, but through facture (Allen 2007).

Bichrome statues from Roman Aphrodisias operate on a similar logic of mutual contrast. Although Aphrodisian marble is generally white, it demonstrates a wide range of hues, ranging from blushing pink to slightly blue, and occasionally yields thick veins of dark blue-gray verging on black (de Chaisemartin 1999, 262). These could be exploited for significant visual effects. By carving at the intersection of such veins, sculptors could produce black-and-white statues and statuettes, such as the Triton in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum, whose white human torso gives way to a black fishtail (de Chaisemartin 1999, 262, fig. 1), or the statuette of a white Europa perched atop a blue-black bull (Rockwell 1991, 138–140, figs. 19–20). Here, the set of oppositions embodied in these characters and stories—the tension between upper and lower, human and animal, restrained and impulsive—was mapped out visually through a contrast in fabric. That the narrative tradition held Zeus to have adopted the form of a *white* bull rather than a black one (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 2.852) proves that clarity of message, not

any kind of mimetic fidelity, is what informed the sculptor's choice of material. The same strategy could even be extended to govern entire ensembles of statuary, as with the Gigantomachy group found in Silahtarāğa, near Istanbul ([Figure 8.6](#); cf. de Chaisemartin 1984, 73–74). Now in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum, this ensemble pits Olympians, rendered in white marble, against anguipedic Giants in black limestone. The pattern is now familiar: the logic of the gigantomachy revolved around similar pairs of widely understood opposites—the battle between anthropomorphic and theriomorphic, civilized and bestial, superior and inferior—and again we find those central narrative tensions conveyed through polarized stones. In isolation neither white marble nor black limestone carried any of these associations in the Roman imagination. Yet when explicitly juxtaposed within a single work, the desired signification was set in motion.



Figure 8.6 Gigantomachy group from Silahtarāğa, with Olympians in white marble and Giants in black limestone, second half of second century CE. Istanbul, Archaeological Museum.

Photo: Mont Allen.

Contrasts in Tooling: Chisel and Drill

For the most widespread use of mutually contrasting techniques to separate figures and guide interpretation, however, we turn to funerary art and questions of tooling, particularly those of chisel and drill. Although the latter had been employed for working marble as far back as the archaic period in Greece, this was nothing compared to the popularity that it enjoyed in Roman hands during the second and third centuries, when it was used to render a wide variety of surface effects. This depended on a fundamental change in attitude toward traces of tooling: a willingness to advertise, rather than hide, tool marks. This stood in marked contrast to earlier practice. Greek sculptors had already employed the drill extensively for carving; but the

archaic and classical ideal was a final surface devoid of any trace of tooling (Adam 1966, 13–14), and so they took obsessive care to efface all such marks, whether of chisel or drill. Hellenistic carvers show greater tolerance for tool marks, and extend this even to the drill, whose traces they often leave. However, it is Roman artists who actively thematize the tool, turning its distinctive optical bite into something capable of producing semantic value.

This was a prerequisite for a striking development within Roman art: the invention early in the third century of better methods for differentiating the dead from those figures with whom they shared pictorial space on the front of sarcophagi. Marble relief sarcophagi were one of the Late Empire's central artistic products, and an important locus of self-representation. Easy identification of the deceased amid their crowded and bustling figural scenes was thus an urgent pictorial priority. The solution was to differentiate his image from the host of surrounding mythological figures, deities, and personifications through a contrast in tooling: while the coiffures of ancillary figures are heavily bored and drilled—indeed, they thematize the drill—the hair of the departed is worked solely with the chisel.

Since this convention of facture structures the depiction of the dead on almost every metropolitan Roman sarcophagus of the third century, examples are endless. A good one is the so-called Annona sarcophagus in Rome's Palazzo Massimo ([Figure 8.7](#)). It depicts a husband and wife, clasping their right hands in the symbol of marital fidelity and harmony (the *junctio dextrarum*), while a regally diademed Juno Pronuba, or Concordia, emblem of marital concord, stands between the couple, enfolding them in her symbolic embrace. An eye to the carving quickly reveals the chasm separating the treatment of the hair: that of the deceased is defined by the chisel alone, in stark contrast to Juno, whose richly textured hair undulates in a dramatic rhythm of drilled holes and grooves. The gulf in their ontological status, and thus in their representational function, is here indicated through a contrast in technique. Or take the sarcophagus from Acilia in the same museum evoking the ritual procession through which a new magistrate might enter office ([Figure 8.8](#); cf. Wrede 2001, 71, 74). Here the deceased is accompanied by a variety of figures. Some, such as the *genius senatus*, the personification of the Senate, represent abstract ideas. Others, such as the *equites* (“knights”) and other civilians making up his entourage, represent real, if not specific, men. The convention still holds, however: if the separate representational status of the deceased is to be isolated within the composition, his hair alone must not be drilled. On pieces such as these, then, Roman carvers pressed the contrasting visual effects of chisel and drill into service as semiotic markers to articulate the status of figures and evoke different levels of response on the viewer's part.



Figure 8.7 Detail of a sarcophagus showing husband and wife with personification of marital *concordia* (the “Annona sarcophagus”), c. 270–280 CE. Rome, National Museum, Palazzo Massimo, inv. 40799.

Photo: Mont Allen.



Figure 8.8 Detail of a sarcophagus showing the procession of a magistrate into high office (the “Acilia sarcophagus”), c. 280 CE. Rome, National Museum, Palazzo Massimo, inv. 126372.

Photo: Mont Allen.

Scope for Future Research

Our brief tour of facture, technique, and message in Roman art ends here. We have seen how Roman artists exploited materials and techniques for their semantic potential, turning facture itself into something capable of clarifying content and guiding interpretation: not a neutral and passive instrument for realizing iconography, but an active partner in the hard work of signification—in multiple media and genres, and spanning the full range of Roman artistic production, from precedent in the Greek world through the Late Empire.

Where does the study of the intersection of facture and meaning go from here? Almost anywhere it likes, because the field is wide open. New scientific developments in particular open up several promising avenues. To give one example: technological advances in stable isotope analysis, neutron activation analysis, and X-ray diffraction spectroscopy are making it possible as never before to identify the geographical origins of stones. This is revolutionizing our knowledge of the marble trade, and of ancient trade routes in general. However, it has also yielded unexpected data about how marbles from particular quarries were selectively chosen for certain subjects. X-ray diffraction has recently made it possible, for example, to identify marble from Thasos, the northernmost island in the Greek Aegean. As a result, we have

discovered that Thasian marble was the stone of choice for Flavian portraits featuring a new and particularly fluffy upswept hairstyle likely derived from Hellenistic images of Aphrodite (Herrmann 2002, 220–221, figs. 8–14). Part of Thasian’s popularity here may be due to carving considerations: although its exceptional hardness makes it difficult to work, it is also one of the coarsest-grained marbles; viewers may have felt that its particularly large crystals contributed to the fluffy effect of the finished product. Yet it is also possible that the stone carried associations in this context (with prestige? with Aphrodite?) that played a role in its popularity. As our ability to confirm the provenance of stones increases, we can expect their patterns of use, and the reasons behind them, to grow clearer.

The study of polychromy in ancient sculpture, particularly the use of paint and gilding, is another burgeoning field. So far Greek art has received greater attention, thanks in no small measure to the pioneering work of Vinzenz Brinkmann (2003), but research in Roman polychromy is expanding, and has already yielded tantalizing results. It seems that Roman artists, like their Greek counterparts, applied paint to sculpture primarily for mimetic effect. Producing a vibrantly lifelike sculptural presence was the main goal, with colors coded to represent reality: red for lips, blue and other colors for eyes, blond or brown hair for Romans, red hair for barbarians, and so on. Gilding, however, could follow a slightly different logic. It was preferentially employed for statues of gods, heroes, and emperors—to lend them not a naturalistic color, but a supernatural radiance (Bradley 2009, 440–445). Here again, then, we see technique used to articulate the status of the figures depicted, demarcating categories and levels of reality. The study of Roman polychromy thus holds much promise, particularly if its purview expands to encompass lamentably understudied genres of relief sculpture such as sarcophagi.

I close with a final observation. Facture was often the most visible component of a work of art, more visible than the specifics of iconography or nuances of form and style. Material and technique thus had the potential to communicate more directly, if less subtly, than these. This is especially relevant in light of scholarship (most recently Hölscher 2009) that has drawn attention to how dimly perceived much ancient sculpture, especially architectural sculpture, must have been, given the difficult viewing conditions, and questioned how deeply ancient viewers “read” and interpreted their art at all. Given their emphatic immediacy, we may find that greater attention to the communicative power of material and technique will help to resolve some of these conundrums.

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

The intersection of facture and meaning in Roman art is still largely understudied. General introductions to the topic are few, and overarching synthesis is hard to come by. The following, however, provide good points of entry for particular topics within the field.

Borghini (2004) is a lavishly illustrated guide to the various colored marbles used by Roman sculptors and architects. It contains a rich color photograph of every stone discussed, arranged alphabetically for easy reference. Bradley (2009) is a concise account of how color was

employed on ancient (mostly Roman) sculpture, with particular emphasis on its mimetic effect. Gregarek (1999) is a masterfully detailed examination of imperial Roman statuary in colored marble and other stones. Grossman (2003) is a very accessible basic introduction to both style and technique in sculpture, well illustrated, with entries organized alphabetically for easy reference. Lapatin (2001) is a landmark investigation of chryselephantine sculpture in both Greek and Roman worlds. He covers not only the special techniques used to fashion them, but also the role they occupied in the ancient imagination. Ling (1991, ch. 10) is still the best account of the techniques used in Roman fresco painting, from preparatory plastering through mixing and application of pigments, and organization of workflow. Panzanelli (2008) is a stunningly illustrated catalogue of the exhibition *The Color of Life: Polychromy in Sculpture from Antiquity to the Present* mounted at the Getty Villa. It collects important examples of Greek and Roman polychromy, along with their modern reconstructions, in a single volume, accompanied by informative essays. Rockwell (1993), despite its general title, is almost entirely devoted to ancient Greek and (particularly) Roman sculptural practice, from initial quarrying to final polishing. It extensively treats the various tools used, their design and function, with special attention to the sequence of operations in carving.

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CHAPTER 9

Roman Art and the Artist

Michael Squire

There really is no such thing as Art. There are only artists.

(Gombrich 1989, 3)

The opening words of Ernst Gombrich's *Story of Art* express something fundamental about modern aesthetics. For us, art always means artists. This is not merely a question of banal pragmatics—that, without those who produce art, no art would ever be produced. At stake is a deeper set of ideological assumptions: viewing something as “art” means presuming something about the creative personalities behind it.

This modern framework for conceptualizing art(ists) is institutionalized on a host of different levels. Inspect almost any museum or gallery label, for example, and you will most likely be supplied (wherever possible) with biographical information about the artistic personality responsible for the juxtaposed object or image. The process of buying and selling works revolves around a related rhetoric, as indeed does modern copyright law. When an unmade bed was nominated for a Turner Prize in 1999, one of the things that made it so famous was its maker, Tracey Emin; by the same token, Sotheby's would never have raised £111,000,000 (\$198,000,000) for its 2008 *Beautiful Inside My Head Forever* auction had it not been for the celebrity of the associated artist (Damien Hirst).

The same interest in artistic personality has also long shaped the academic discipline of art history. Ever since Vasari published the first edition of his *Lives of the Artists* in 1550, structuring it around the biographies of various architects, sculptors, and painters, our histories of art have tended to revolve around individual artistic personalities. As Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz first diagnosed in 1934, this rhetoric itself has a history, grounded in the Christian theology of the Renaissance: it is bound up with a particular idea of creative “genius,” whereby the creative craftsman serves as the human counterpart to the divine Creator of the Judaeo-Christian tradition (Kris and Kurz 1979; cf. Mason 1993, 225–233; Muller-Dufeu 2011, 265–279; Squire 2013, 359–369).

When approached from this framework, classical art—and Roman art in particular—poses something of a problem (cf. Osborne 2010, 231–233). True, many scholars have applied an artist-centered approach (for the historiography, see Jockey 2001; Kansteiner et al. 2014, 1.xi–liv; Vollkommer 2015, 107–111). However, the search for Roman artists is fraught with difficulties. On the one hand, we know very little about those who made Greco-Roman art: most Greek and Roman writers were not interested in artists, at least not in the same sorts of ways as modern art historians. On the other hand, the little that we do know about Roman artists in particular suggests that, ethnically (or at least linguistically) speaking, the majority were more “Greek” than they were “Roman.” The difficulty of recovering Roman artists is

therefore bound up with the problems of delineating Roman art *tout court*. If there is no such thing as the “Roman artist,” is it fair to talk of “Roman art”—either as something “Roman,” or indeed as “art” (Brendel 1979, 3–9)?

This chapter does not attempt to solve these issues. Instead, it offers a selective survey of what we can say about those responsible for Roman visual culture, especially in the late Republic and early Empire. At the same time, my aim is to situate this search for the Roman artist within its particular disciplinary context: to ask why questions of the artist matter for *A Companion to Roman Art* at large.

A Crisis of Identity?

The problem of delineating both Roman art and Roman artists stretches back to Johann Joachim Winckelmann, whose pioneering *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (“History of the Art of Antiquity”) was first published in 1764. “The concept of a Roman style in art ...,” Winckelmann writes, “is a delusion” (2006, 285): “Roman artists” were “students of the Greeks,” and as such “would have developed no style of their own” (2006, 284). Because Roman “artists” were thought to have simply imitated (and usually botched) the “noble simplicity and quiet grandeur” (*edle Einfalt und stille Größe*) of their Greek forebears, Roman art was judged to be Greek art in degenerate disguise. It is an assumption that has very much endured. For all the subsequent attempts to rehabilitate the field of Roman art history, many nineteenth- and twentieth-century archaeologists broadly concurred: “art under the Empire may be described as Greek art in the service of the Imperial idea,” opines Jocelyn Toynbee (1934, xx); in the words of Martin Robertson, “the creative artist as he was known in Greece tends to fade out between the program organizer and the craftsman” (1975, 1.605).

Other contributors to this book have already challenged some of the ideologies at work here. As Christopher Hallett ([Chapter 1](#), this volume) has explained, Roman art always involved more than passive copying of the Greek. Still, the question remains: Where does this prevailing rhetoric about Roman art—and the Roman artist—come from?

One answer is Roman writers themselves (Marvin 2008, 10–15). For most Roman authors, to talk of sculpture and painting was to talk in exclusively Greek terms. Take, for instance, an imaginary conversation about sculpture and sculptors recounted by Virgil in the late first century BCE. In the sixth book of his Latin epic poem on Rome’s foundation, Virgil has the ghost of Anchises (Aeneas’ father) sketch the cultural aspirations of Augustan Rome (*Aeneid* 6.847–853):

Others, I have no doubt, will fashion breathing bronze with softer mold; others will coax living features out of marble, prove better at pleading their cases, and trace the motions of the heavens with their drawing-rods, predicting the rising of the stars. You, Roman, are to rule the peoples of the earth with sovereign power. These will be your skills: to establish peace, to spare the conquered, and to subdue the proud.

Anchises leaves these “other” peoples unnamed: so famous were the Greek contributions to

bronze casting, marble statuary, and science (among other “arts”) that they hardly needed spelling out. Yet Rome’s destiny would be different. Greece was famous for its aesthetics, rhetoric, and science. Rome, by contrast, would privilege *imperium* (“sovereignty,” “command,” “empire”).

Subsequent Latin authors followed suit, defining artistic production as an almost exclusively Greek affair. Writing in the first century CE, Quintilian described the styles of many a painter and sculptor, comparing them with various literary rhetorical voices (Austin 1946 on *Institutes of Oratory* 12.10.1–10; cf. Pollitt 1974, 81–84; Hölscher 2004, 92–98; Squire 2013, 365–366); likewise, Pliny the Elder—our most important source for all things art historical—structures large chunks of his *Natural History* around specific individual artists, often listing them in alphabetical order (e.g., 34.72–83, 85, 86–89, 91; cf. Rouveret 1995). And yet, just as the Virgilian Anchises had predicted, the majority of the artists discussed are Greek. The same holds true of so-called Second Sophistic authors, writing in Greek rather than Latin, and especially those working in the second century CE. When the likes of Pausanias, Lucian, and Dio Chrysostom talk about artworks, their canon revolves around a pre-established set of Greek works. Following Hellenistic critical traditions (in particular, fourth- and third-century BCE writers like Xenocrates, Douris, and Antigonos), the same “A-list” of late classical artists recurs: just as Apelles, Parrhasius, and Zeuxis are judged proverbial for their excellence in painting, Myron, Pheidias, and Praxiteles are said to embody the best in sculptural craftsmanship.

Archaeological evidence corroborates this general picture. We know of numerous works that were transported to Rome, famous above all because of those who made them: wherever they turned, inhabitants of the city found themselves surrounded by Greek masterworks—Apelles’ *Aphrodite Anadyomene*, Myron’s bronze statue of a heifer, the famous “line-painting” of Apelles and Protogenes, and so on (cf. Bravi 2012; Rutledge 2012, 31–121). Works like these may be lost, but we find epigraphic testimony to their general existence. In the Temple of Peace area of the Roman forum, for example, five second-century CE statue bases have been excavated, each inscribed in Greek, and each naming its respective celebrity artist (Praxiteles, Leochares, Kephisodotos, Parthenokles, and Pythokles son of Polyclitus: La Rocca 2001, 196–201; Noreña 2003, 28–29). Whether these bases really supported statues by these artists, or instead served as pedestals for later imitations (installed after a fire in 192 CE?), it is the very gesture of attribution that strikes me as important. Even in later antiquity, excellence in sculpture and painting remained a Greek preserve, associated with the same sorts of prized practitioners; so it is that a number of third-century statue bases in Rome likewise attribute their lost sculptures to legendary greats like Polyclitus, Pheidias, and Praxiteles (*CIL* 6.10038–43; cf., e.g., Gregori 1994; Coates-Stephens 2007, 181; Kreikenbom 2013, 63–65).

Of course, we do occasionally hear of distinctive Roman contributions in the fields of painting and sculpture. Pliny tells us of men like Arellius, Cornelius Pinus, Attius Priscus, Lepidus, and Famulus—the latter famous not only for decorating Nero’s Golden House, but also for his distinctly Roman attire (a toga: *Natural History* 35.119–120). Along the way, Pliny also mentions some more Roman-sounding names, like that of “Studius,” credited with inventing landscape painting (*Natural History* 35.116: cf. Ling 1977). Yet these are by and large the

exceptions. When Columella, a contemporary of Pliny, wants to summon up an image of the artist, he turns to set-piece Greek names (Protagenes, Apelles, Parrhasius, Bryaxis, Lysippus, Praxiteles, Polyclitus: *Agriculture* 1.Praef.30–31; contrast the situation with that of literary authors, where Columella cites Roman writers like Accius, Virgil, and Cicero as exemplary). A little earlier, in the first century BCE, Cicero had fallen back on the same rhetoric, contrasting Roman achievements in poetry with those in painting, and acknowledging the superiority of Greek masters like Polyclitus and Parrhasius (*Tusculan Disputations* 1.4): if the Roman painter Fabius Pictor had only been better appraised in the fourth century BCE, Cicero quips, might things not have turned out differently?

All of this has made the modern study of Roman art(ists) very different from that of Greek. Following Winckelmann and his library of ancient texts, the usual response has been to downplay “Roman” contributions and instead to privilege “Greek” painters and sculptors. Ever since Adolf Furtwängler in the late nineteenth century, the concept of what was labeled Roman *Idealskulptur* (literally, “ideal sculpture”) has been used to reconstruct the lost *Meisterwerke* (“masterpieces”) of Greek artists. Moreover, while it is still *de rigueur* to talk of “personal styles” when it comes to Greek statues—almost all of them mediated through much later Roman imperial imitations—there have been relatively few parallel attempts when it comes to Roman craftsmen (Palagia and Pollitt 1996; cf. Coarelli 1980; Pekáry 1995, 13; Schollmeyer 2005, 25–27). Where scholarship on Greek vase painting has long centered around the attribution of materials to named or anonymous individuals (“Berlin Painter,” “Pig Painter,” “Elbows-Out Painter,” and so on: see, e.g., Elsner 1990; Neer 1997), archaeologists have only rarely ventured to do the same for Roman objects—for example, Richardson (2000) and Esposito (2009) on Campanian wall painting, or Phillips (1976) on a Romano-British workshop at Carlisle. Generally speaking, Greek artists have been assumed to matter in a way that Roman artists have not.

In the absence of Roman artists, art historians have found a different variable to fill the void: that of the patron—the individual or family who commissioned the work (and who paid the bills). “In the Roman milieu,” as one textbook guide to Roman sculpture insists, “it was the patron who had the most significant impact on the appearance of a work of art” (Kleiner 1992, 4; cf., e.g., Ridgway 1969, 116–117; Cornell 1987, 17–26; Strong 1994, 11; Stewart 2008, 32–38). According to this rhetoric, the buyer serves as the active agent in determining what Roman art looked like, while the maker acts as a rather more passive facilitator. Once again, it is a model rooted in textual sources: on the one hand, ancient literary accounts like Cicero’s letters or Trimalchio’s description of his tomb in Petronius’s *Satyricon* (*Satyricon* 71); on the other, epigraphic records like Augustus’ inscribed *Res Gestae*, which lists the emperor’s many sculptural and architectural projects, but not once names a collaborating artist or engineer (cf. Cooley 2009).

Of course, customers were important for the design and execution of works in the Roman world, just as they were in the Greek. However, scholars have been somewhat vague about what “patronage” might mean. For one thing, the concept can all too easily imply an alien system of artistic sponsorship, applied anachronistically from Renaissance Italy back to ancient Rome; it is worth observing, for example, that there is no evidence for Roman artists

turning to a “patron” in the way that Roman poets evidently did; while Maecenas “patronized” the likes of Virgil, Propertius, and Horace, he seems never to have sponsored young sculptors or painters. Perhaps most damningly of all, talk of “patrons” can obscure the evident role played by Roman artists themselves. If we want to understand the production of Roman art, we first have to establish a clearer picture of those who produced it. And that means beginning with their social standing.

A Portrait of the Artist?

What kind of people made Roman art, and how were they regarded within Roman society at large? This question is usually answered on the basis of extant literary sources, in particular those written by Greek authors in the second century CE. In his disdain for all forms of manual labor, Plutarch writes that, however much one might admire their work, nobody would want to be a great sculptor like Pheidias or Polyclitus: “just because a work pleases you through its charm,” as Plutarch puts it, “it does not necessarily follow that the man who wrought it is worthy of your esteem” (*Pericles* 2.1; interestingly, Plutarch says the same about certain Greek poets like Anacreon, Philetas, and Archilochus).

A make-believe autobiography by another Second Sophistic Greek author plays on similar themes. Lucian’s *Dream* describes how the young author supposedly chose between a life of sculptural labor and literary pursuits (Romm 1990; cf. Pekáry 2002, 53–69, esp. 59–60). After a short apprenticeship with his uncle, Lucian explains, he was visited in a dream by personifications of “Sculptural skill” (*Hermoglyphikê technê*) and “Education” (*Paideia*). Although Sculpture promises fame and renown—Lucian, too, could be like Myron or Polyclitus, “worshipped second only to the gods” (*Dream* 8)—the woman’s physical appearance suggests otherwise. While Education is “fair in face, fair in manner, and orderly in her dress,” Sculpture looks “like a manly work-woman, with unkempt hair, calloused hands and her clothing kilted up, all caked in dust” (*Dream* 6). Sculpture’s speech is short, her sentences gruff, and her argument lackluster (so much so, the author adds, that he can barely now remember it). Yet things are very different with the second speaker. When Education takes to the floor, she cuts a contrasting figure, taking issue with almost every argument spoken by Sculpture before her. Even if Lucian were to become a sculptor and reach the very top of his trade—even if his works were to be praised like those of Pheidias or Polyclitus—let him ask himself: Would anybody really envy him (*Dream* 9)?

You would be nothing but a manual laborer, whose work is bodily, and whose every life-hope is placed in the body. You yourself would be invisible, and your pay would be miserly and mean; your judgments would be abased, and you would be disreputable in public. You would not be sought out by your friends, feared by your enemies, nor would your fellow citizens envy you. No, you would be nothing but a manual laborer: one of the masses, always cringing to the man above you, subservient to the man trained in speech [*legein*] ...

Lucian’s (speech championing Education’s) speech proceeds to champion rhetorical craftsmanship: *Paideia* alone is said to bestow renown, while the sculptor is nothing but a

menial mechanic (*banausos*). The young apprentice listens patiently to Education before signing up hook, line, and sinker. After relaying the story, moreover, Lucian opines that he made the right decision: Despite his earlier poverty, do we not regard Lucian at least as highly as any sculptor (*Dream* 18)?

Plutarch and Lucian leave little doubt as to the lot of the sculptor. Nevertheless, the question remains: How literally should we take such literary accounts? True, there are numerous other unflattering ancient references to craftsmen (cf. Burford 1972, 11–27; Stewart 2008, 18–21). At the same time, such self-consciously literary discussions of artistic craftsmanship are never innocent or neutral: the artist had long served as a figure for contemplating the literary author; precisely because of their nature as *texts*, in other words, textual accounts can offer somewhat biased perspectives. It is also clear that learning to paint, draw, or devise plans was not necessarily mutually exclusive with the lettered pursuits of poetry, literature, and rhetoric. However “bauausic” the trade, we can be sure that even fledgling Roman emperors were sometimes schooled in painting and sculpture (Pekáry 1995, 16–17). Among the “liberal arts” (*liberales disciplinae*) taught to the dilettante Nero, for example, are said to have been not only philosophy, oratory, and poetry, but also painting and sculpture (Suetonius, *Nero* 52). Hadrian, too, is described as knowing something about architecture (the cause for a celebrated feud with the architect Apollodorus: Cassius Dio 69.4). A fourth-century text likewise tells how Marcus Antoninus learned painting from Diognetus, just as Severus Alexander could “paint marvelously” (*Scriptores Historiae Augustae, Marcus Antoninus* 4.9; *Severus Alexander* 27.7; for other similar stories, see Calabi Limentani 1958, 22–23, n.35). Of course, such tales had a rhetorical purpose of their own; in the case of Nero, the detail was certainly intended to strike a scandalous note (how very like Nero to wallow in something as degradingly Greek as art!). Still, accounts like these nonetheless offer a gentle corrective to Lucian’s own perspective: if nothing else, they demonstrate a potential Roman interest in practical artistic education—even among the future rulers of Rome.

Another difficulty in determining the status of Roman artists lies in our overarching concept of the “artist” itself. Where the modern West tends to conceptualize the visual “arts” as a single unity, Greek and Latin thinkers usually distinguished more readily between different sorts of media: Pliny the Elder talks less of “artists” in general than of painters, engravers, and sculptors (or more accurately, of sculptors working in metal, metal alloy, and stone). Linguistically speaking, moreover, there was little to distinguish “liberal” artists from other sorts of craftsmen: if A-list celebrities like Myron and Apelles could be deemed *technitai* and *artifices*, so too could the local cobbler or builder. As Paul Oskar Kristeller famously argued, the ancient world did not share our modern distinction between “arts” and “crafts,” or indeed between “artists” and “craftsmen” (Kristeller 1990, 170–171; Shiner 2001, 22–24; Squire 2010; Koch 2013, esp. ix–xvii; cf. Schweitzer 1925, and Bianchi Bandinelli 1957, albeit with response by Guarducci 1958).

If we want to reconstruct what life as a Roman artist was like, we therefore have to distinguish between different trades. From this perspective, some professions were evidently deemed nobler than others. Take the case of architecture (Gros 1983; Donderer 1996; Anderson 1997, 3–67; Wilson-Jones 2000, 19–30; Taylor 2003, 9–14; cf. Thomas, [Chapter 18](#), this volume).

According to Vitruvius—himself a working architect, writing in the late first century BCE—practitioners of architecture required both natural talent and disciplined self-application (Donderer 1996, 57–61). The architect, writes Vitruvius, must be not only “a man of letters, a skilled draftsman, and learned in geometry,” but also “knowledgeable about all sorts of histories, a diligent student of philosophy, acquainted with music, conversant in medicine, complete with an understanding of law, and informed about astrology and astronomical calculations” (*On Architecture* 1.3–10; cf. Cicero, *On Obligations* 1.151). In social terms, such training must have blurred boundaries between “tradesmen” and “scholars.” Indeed, we find some architects occupying fairly prominent social positions, and all across the Roman Empire (Donderer 1996, 71–76). While epigraphic dedications yield the place of honor to the architectural sponsor, some practitioners made sure that their own names were duly noted. One famous example is the inscription attached to the arch of a Trajanic bridge at Alcántara in western Spain: the text repeated the name of the architect, one Gaius Julius Lacer, proclaiming how “noble Lacer... made with divine skill [*diuina arte*] a bridge that will endure for all earthly eternity” (*CIL* 2.761; Donderer 1996, 230–233, nos. A120–1; cf. Burford 1972, 214; Taylor 2003, 9–12). Lucian may have been proud of his monumental literary career, but Lacer seems to have been no less proud of his architectural achievements.

Logistics and Practicalities

Being a Roman architect, or indeed any other sort of craftsman, clearly involved additional internal hierarchies. As Lucian’s *Dream* suggests, apprenticeships seem to have been the normal way of learning a craft (cf. Muller-Dufeu 2011, 93–120), whereby children were schooled in the trade of their father or uncle. Apprentices would then work their way up the workshop ladder. This would most likely involve specializing in a particular medium. Sometimes, though, training seems to have been conducted along more specific lines. So it is, for example, that one funerary inscription from Rome commemorates its sponsor not as a “sculptor,” but rather as an *oculararius*—that is, the maker of sculpted eyes to insert within statues (*CIL* 6.9402; Calabi Limentani 1958, 173, no. 175; more generally on ancient workshops, cf. Heilmeyer 2004 and Russell 2013, 344–350).

Archaeological evidence supports this stratified picture (Burford 1972, 87–91; Conlin 1997, 30–34). Truth be told, we know very little about the structure of Roman apprenticeships, and the little that we do know relates to non-artistic systems of training (and may in any case pertain to specific regions of the Empire: cf. Westermann 1914). Just occasionally, however, the material record offers tantalizing glimpses into working practice. The site of Aphrodisias in southwest Turkey provides one such example. Excavations at Aphrodisias have uncovered some 28 “apprentice pieces” of marble hands and feet, sometimes worked on both sides, which evidently served as training exercises for budding young sculptors ([Figure 9.1](#); cf. Van Voorhis 1998 and 2012, 48–53; Hasaki 2012, 266–267); to the north of the city’s North Agora, occupying two rooms of a modified stoa and an outdoor “yard,” an abandoned late antique sculptor’s workshop also yields some special insights into how and where sculptures were manufactured, marketed, and sold (Rockwell 1991 and 2008; Van Voorhis 2012 and

forthcoming; Russell 2013, 345; cf. Smith 2008 and 2011, and the parallels listed in Kristensen 2012, 8). Epigraphic materials are important here too. Inscriptions confirm how artists could work in close collaboration with one another, and sometimes across a variety of fields; we also read of “father-and-son” teams, handing down skills from one generation to the next (e.g., Donderer 1989, 47; Dunbabin 1999, 274, 276n41; on the whole question of Roman statue production, cf. Russell 2013, esp. 311–351).

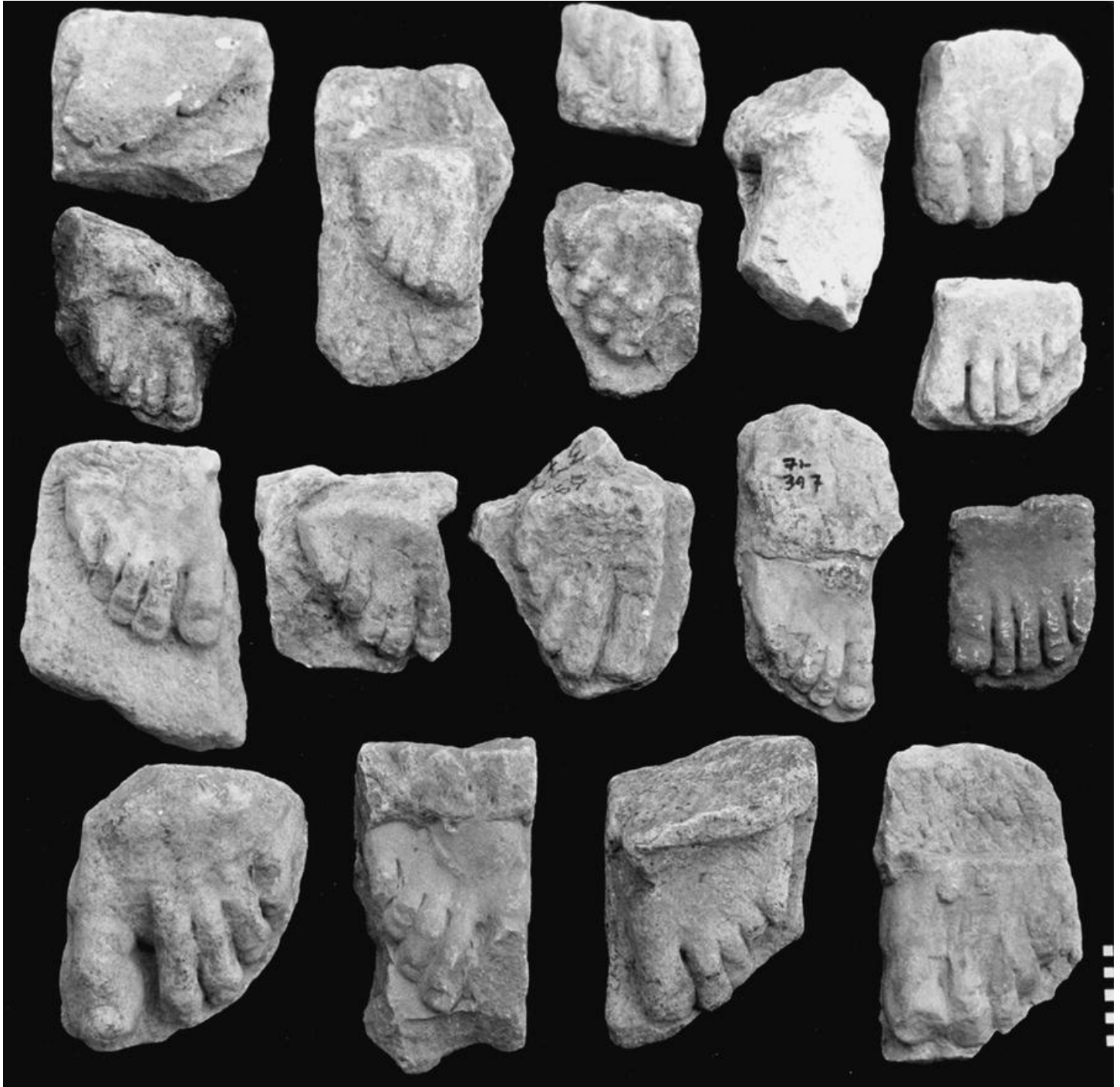


Figure 9.1 Selection of “apprentice pieces” from Aphrodisias, c. third century CE.

Photo: Courtesy of the New York University Excavations at Aphrodisias, provided by Julie Van Voorhis.

It is harder to reconstruct life inside the workshop. Once again, however, there are some

intriguing artistic indications. One fascinating case study comes from the inside of a first- or second-century CE limestone sarcophagus, found in the city of Kerch in the east of the Crimea (ancient Panticapaeum: see Goldman 1999; Fejfer 2008, 156–157; [Figure 9.2](#)). A male figure sits cross-legged, heating an encaustic painting tool over a flame, and looking down toward a *tabula* panel in front of him (complete with checkered lines, perhaps for measuring proportions). Beside that *tabula* stands another blank panel hanging on an easel, and above are three finished portrait paintings (one square and two round, each with contrasting frames). It is tempting to assume that the deceased was a painter, choosing to take this image with him to the grave. Nevertheless, there are a number of apparent anomalies. Quite apart from the fact that the painter is portrayed alone—observe the lack of apprentices or shared workshop—there is something puzzling about the costume. We might possibly expect a northern Black Sea tradesman to wear these sorts of trousers, tunic, and even shoes. As for the cape (*chlamys*) tied around the painter’s shoulders, however, this might seem a somewhat heroic affectation: in death, perhaps, even artists could indulge in a little artistic license.

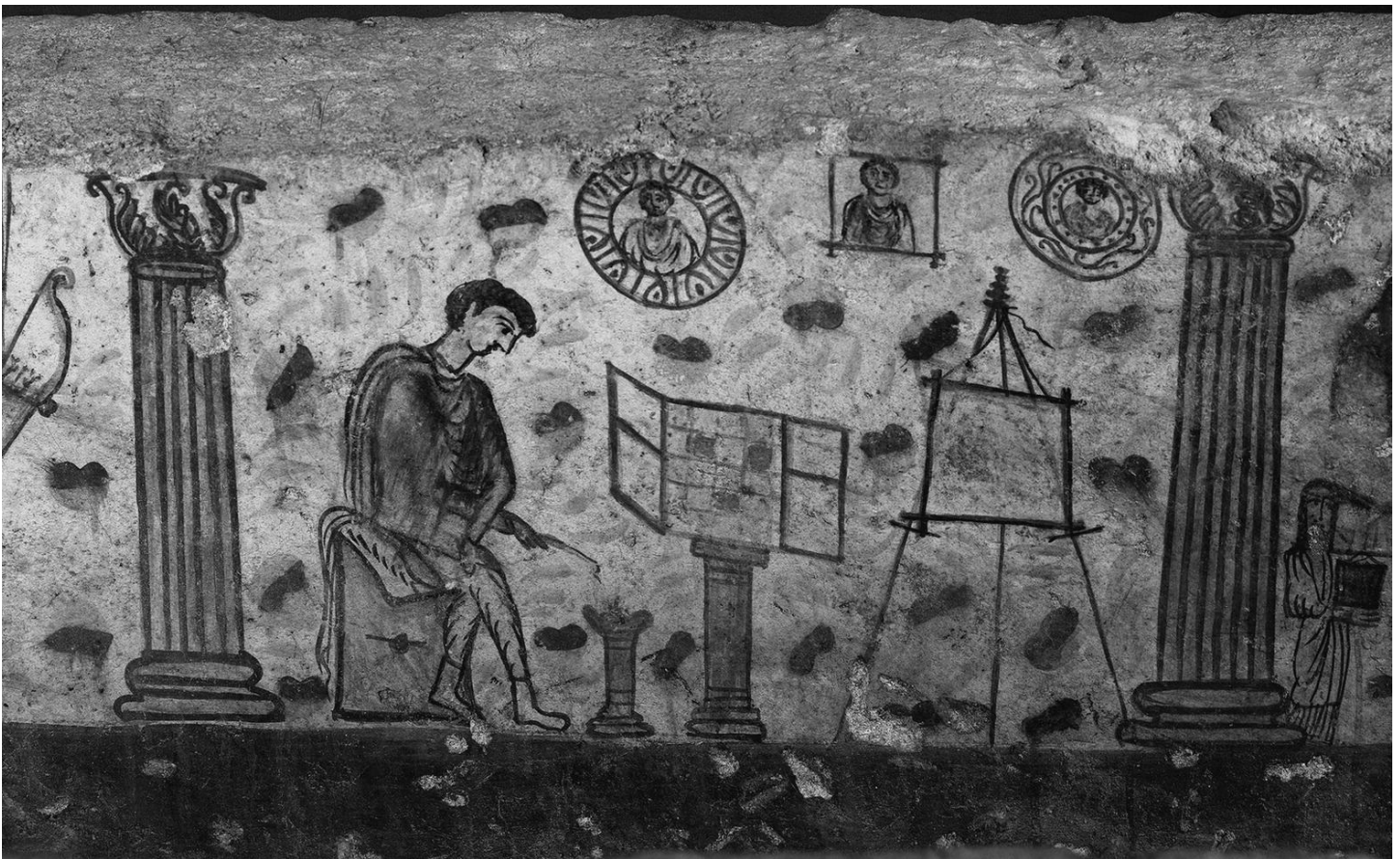


Figure 9.2 Scene of a painter’s workshop, inside a painted limestone sarcophagus from Kerch, first or second century CE. St Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, inv. P-1899.81.

Photo: © The State Hermitage Museum; photograph by Vladimir Terebenin, Leonard Kheifets, and Yuri Molodkovets.

If our sarcophagus painting presents the life of a painter in solitary terms, a second image—this time, a sarcophagus relief from Ephesus showing scenes from inside a sculptor’s workshop ([Figure 9.3](#))—presents a rather different picture (Mendel 1912, 78–80, no. 13; Conlin 1997, 31–32; Jockey 1998, 637–638; Marvin 2008, 219; Russell 2013, 345–347; for parallels, cf.

Van Voorhis 1998, 175n6, along with the 38 examples catalogued by Jockey 1998). To the left of the relief we see five male figures, each apparently assigned a specific labor: one is engaged in a sketch; a second, bearded (and the most senior?) figure chisels away at a togate statue; a third seems to be polishing a fragment on a table; the fourth is shown at work on the drapery of a bust; finally, a young boy looks on, holding additional tools in his arms. Whether or not we agree with Diane Conlin's assessment that the relief depicts the workshop's "pyramid-structure" ("the entire scene ... testifies to the division of labor within a sculptor's workshop in the Roman era based primarily upon age," 1997, 32), the relief does convey the teamwork involved in artistic production. In this workshop, at least, making sculpture is presented as a *collective* enterprise.

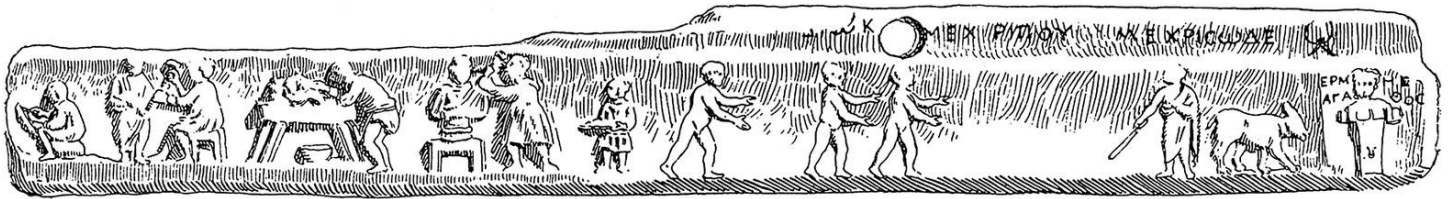


Figure 9.3 Drawing of a sarcophagus relief from Ephesus depicting a Roman sculptural workshop, second century CE.

After: G. Mendel, G., *Catalogue des sculptures grecques, romaines et byzantines*, vol. 1 (Musée Impérial, Constantinople, 1912), p. 79.

What about the nitty-gritty of wages: How much could painters or sculptors hope to earn, and how did this compare with other professions? Needless to say, ancient writers delighted in stories of astronomical fees. Pliny the Elder tells of a contemporary artist called Zenodoros, who charged a whopping 40,000,000 sesterces for a "Hermes" that he made over a ten-year period in Gaul (*Natural History* 35.45). We can nonetheless be sure that most artists earned a much more meager wage. Although evidence is slight here, history has preserved one unique document: the Emperor Diocletian's edict of 301 CE, which attempted to put an end to runaway inflation by imposing maximum prices and wages (for a general introduction, see Corcoran 1996, 205–233; for an amalgamated text and translation, see Frank 1940, 307–421, esp. 337–346; cf. Burford 1972, 143–144; Elsner 1998, 239–241; Dunbabin 1999, 275–276). This document may not be wholly representative of other times and places (cf. Russell 2013, 206–207, 359–360 on the 337 CE Edict of Constantine): the maximum salaries listed were intended to apply to the eastern Empire, and most of the various fragments come from Greece, Asia Minor, and Egypt; we might also question the extent to which these late antique wages reflect those of three or four centuries earlier. Despite all these qualifications, the edict perhaps does give some very approximate indications.

So how did artisans fare? The lowest catalogued wage is for sewer cleaners, farm laborers, and mule drivers at up to 25 denarii per day. Carpenters, stonemasons, and floor mosaicists (*tessellarii*)—along with, for example, builders, bakers, and blacksmiths—were to receive twice as much (50 denarii; interestingly, sculptors are omitted). Workers of wall and vault mosaics (*musearii*), on the other hand, could each earn up to 60 denarii. Here, as elsewhere, there were clear hierarchies even within the same industry: we hear, for instance, that figure

painters (*pictores imaginarii*) were twice as well remunerated as fresco workers (*pictores parietarii*), earning a potential 150 (rather than 75) denarii per day (Andersen 1985, 113; Clarke 1991, 57–58; Ling 2000, 105; Esposito 2009, 26–29). Compared to more menial labors, the sum may seem substantial: it was evidently better to paint pictures than to swill sewers. Still, this work could hardly have made one rich (and remember, this was in any case the *maximum* income). A basic daily salary of 50 denarii would only purchase, for example, 50 eggs, two pints of good wine, or four pounds of pork. Other trades did considerably better. If someone teaching architecture could expect up to 100 denarii per pupil per month, the teacher of Latin, Greek, or geometry could claim 200, and the teacher of oratory some 250; most impressive of all is the lawyer, who could earn 250 denarii for opening a case, and a whopping 1,000 denarii for closing it. In terms of financial remuneration, at least, Lucian was surely right: economically speaking, it was better to sell out to letters.

Poor though they might have been, those responsible for Roman art could still accrue considerable sway and status. We have already mentioned the case of Gaius Julius Lacer and his bridge at Alcántara. However, Roman authors record other stories about artists granted special honors or awards—like Plautius Lykon, who was bestowed with citizenship of Ardea in recognition of his paintings in the Temple of Juno (where he was also commemorated with an epigram: Pliny, *Natural History* 35.115). Epigraphic evidence confirms the picture (Burford 1972, 150–151). Among the freedmen and slaves commemorated in a funerary *columbarium* of the Julio-Claudian imperial household, we find a *colorator* (literally “colorer”) named “Anteros,” two painters (*pictores*), and a man named “Syneros” who was apparently responsible for portraits (*imagines*: *CIL* 6.3953, 4008–4009, 3972: cf. Calabi Limentani 1958, 153). Within the further reaches of the Empire, artists could also work their way up local administrative hierarchies. A Greek figure painter from Cyrene named Lucius Sossius Euthycles provides just one instance in the second century CE: a Greek verse epitaph proclaims not only Euthycles’ surpassing *technê* (“craftsmanship”), but also his role within the local administration (Reynolds and Bacchielli 1996; cf. Burford 1972, 208). No less interesting is a mosaicist named Publius Aelius Harpokration (also apparently known as “Proclus”) from Perinthus on the northern Black Sea. This mosaicist is said to have funded the decoration for the city’s sanctuary of Tychê from his own pocket, and the townsfolk consequently honored him with an inscribed statue (*CIG* 2.67–68, no. 2024; cf. Toynbee 1951, 43–44; Burford 1972, 150; Donderer 1989, 74–75, no. A33; Thomas 2007, 333).

Some artists were also sufficiently enamored of their profession as to depict it on their graves. In addition to the Kerch sarcophagus ([Figure 9.2](#)), it is worth noting a handful of funerary altars that portray sculptors at work (Zimmer 1982, 35–37, 153–161, nos. 75–83). [Figure 9.4](#) is one example from early second-century CE Rome (Zimmer 1982, 157–158, no. 80 and Boschung 1987, 114, no. 958; cf. Zimmer 1985, 208–209; D’Ambra 1998, 94–95; Varner 2006, 290–292). The front of the altar shows a seated, bare-footed sculptor, busy chiseling a medallion bust of a young female subject: the well-to-do lady on the right is perhaps a customer (or even the subject of the portrait?), and her tunic and mantle poignantly contrast with the more humble attire of the craftsman. Quite what to make of the altar remains disputed: some have claimed that it does not commemorate the sculptor at all, but rather “the woman in the bust,

commissioned by her female relative whose very act of commissioning such monuments from the sculptor is an advertisement of her pious devotion” (Stewart 2008, 28). However we understand this particular example, though, we should remember that reliefs like [Figure 9.4](#) are remarkably few in number: Gerhard Zimmer’s catalogue of “Roman occupation images” contains just nine “stoneworker” funerary reliefs. When those examples are considered as a collective, moreover, what is most striking is their formulaic correspondence with those depicting other manual occupations—baking, knife sharpening, leatherwork, ship-building, carpentry, and so on (e.g., Zimmer 1982, 107–116; Clarke 2003, 118–125). In one sense, being a sculptor or other artist seems to have been just like being any other sort of manual laborer.





Figure 9.4 Funerary altar showing a sculptor at work, early second century CE. Rome, Vatican Museums, Galleria dei Candalabri, inv. 2671.

Photo: Reproduced by kind permission of the Archiv, Institut für Klassische Archäologie und Museum für Abgüsse Klassischer Bildwerke, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich.

Or was it? Although [Figure 9.4](#) lacks an inscription, other funerary memorials, especially in the Greek east, went much further in claiming a special status for the sculptor. Elaborate verse epigrams and epitaphs were sometimes added to commemorate the deceased. An inscribed Hadrianic herm in the Vatican Museums, for instance, tells of a certain Zenon of Aphrodisias, who proclaims how his “crafts” (*technai*) had led him to many cities: it was because of his being “famous for his work” (*klytoergos*) that he could craft (and afford) the present statue as a memorial to him and his family, as well as others (*IGUR* 3.1222; cf. Loewy 1885, 375, no. 549; Calabi Limentani 1958, 162, no. 77; Burford 1972, 210; Kansteiner et al. 2014, 5.611–612, no. 4214). Another craftsman added a Latin epitaph complete with jingling brag: “Novius Blesamus,” we are told, had decorated both Rome and the larger world with his statues so that everyone would now remember his name (*hic olim statuis urbem decoravit et orbem: nomen habet populus*; *CIL* 6.23083; Calabi Limentani 1958, 160, no. 57; Thomas 2007, 329). Some artists evidently *were* proud of their profession. And some even boasted of it from beyond the grave.

What’s in a Name?

Inscriptions like these are interesting in and of themselves. Even when we only have the inscribed names of the person behind an object, such information can reveal something about the individuals who produced it. Inscribed signatures help yield information about identity and background. Sometimes, however, they also offer some tentative hints about how artists themselves understood the process of artistic production (cf. Kreikenbom 2013).

We should note here that only a minority of artifacts were signed in the Roman world. Indeed, certain classes of objects—historical reliefs and portraits intended for civic rather than private display, for example—are hardly ever inscribed with signatures: “in such works,” writes Alison Burford, “the sculptor acted not as an independent designer and executant of his craft, but as an imperial archivist, not an initiator of the composition but a propagandist” (Burford 1972, 213—although the author proceeds to mention some notable exceptions). The practice of signing works had much earlier Greek precedent, but we do not find any significant bias in the geographical spread of signatures. Nor were certain media necessarily more likely to bear

signatures than others: we find names attached not only to sculptures (Toynbee 1951, 17–33), but also occasionally to paintings (ibid., 35–42), mosaics (ibid., 43–50; Donderer 1989), gems and silverware (Toynbee 1951, 51–54; cf. Lapatin, Chaoter 17, this volume), and even to humble *terra sigillata* ware (consider the 4,910 “makers” catalogued by Hartley and Dickinson 2008–2012; cf. Thomas 2007, 333–337).

Such signatures were likely intended first and foremost as a form of advertising (Donderer 1989, 45–47; cf. Siebert 1978, esp. 111–112; Dunbabin 1999, 272–273). This is perhaps why, in the case of Roman “copies,” latter-day sculptors paraded their own names rather than those of their more famous forebears. There can be no doubt, for example, that a first-century BCE bronze bust from the Villa of the Papyri in Herculaneum is derived from the celebrated *Doryphoros* of Polyclitus ([Figure 9.5](#)), but we find no mention of the fifth-century artist on this object (“Apollonios, son of Archias, the Athenian, made it”: cf. Loewy 1885, 240–241, no. 341; Vollkommer 2001–2004, 1.72, s.v. “Apollonios (VII)”; Mattusch 2005, 278–282; Anguissola 2012, 127–128). Likewise, the artist of an over-lifesize marble statue designed for the third-century CE Baths of Caracalla glosses over the statue’s original fourth-century BCE derivation, modeled after Lysippus’ “resting Heracles” type: “Glycon the Athenian made it” (cf. Loewy 1885, 245–246, no. 345; Vollkommer 2001–2004, 1.268–269, s.v. “Glykon”; cf. Krull 1985, 10–22; Kreikenbom 2013). When it came to the established “masterworks” of Greek painting and sculpture, the name of the modern-day copier could evidently matter (cf. Anguissola 2012, 113–170). Literary sources paint a similar picture: Pliny records the name of an Athenian artist called Dionysius who copied a painting by Pausias (and sold it for two talents: *Natural History* 35.125); Pausanias likewise records the name of a certain “Menodoros of Athens” who copied Praxiteles’ statue of Eros at Thespieae (9.27.4).

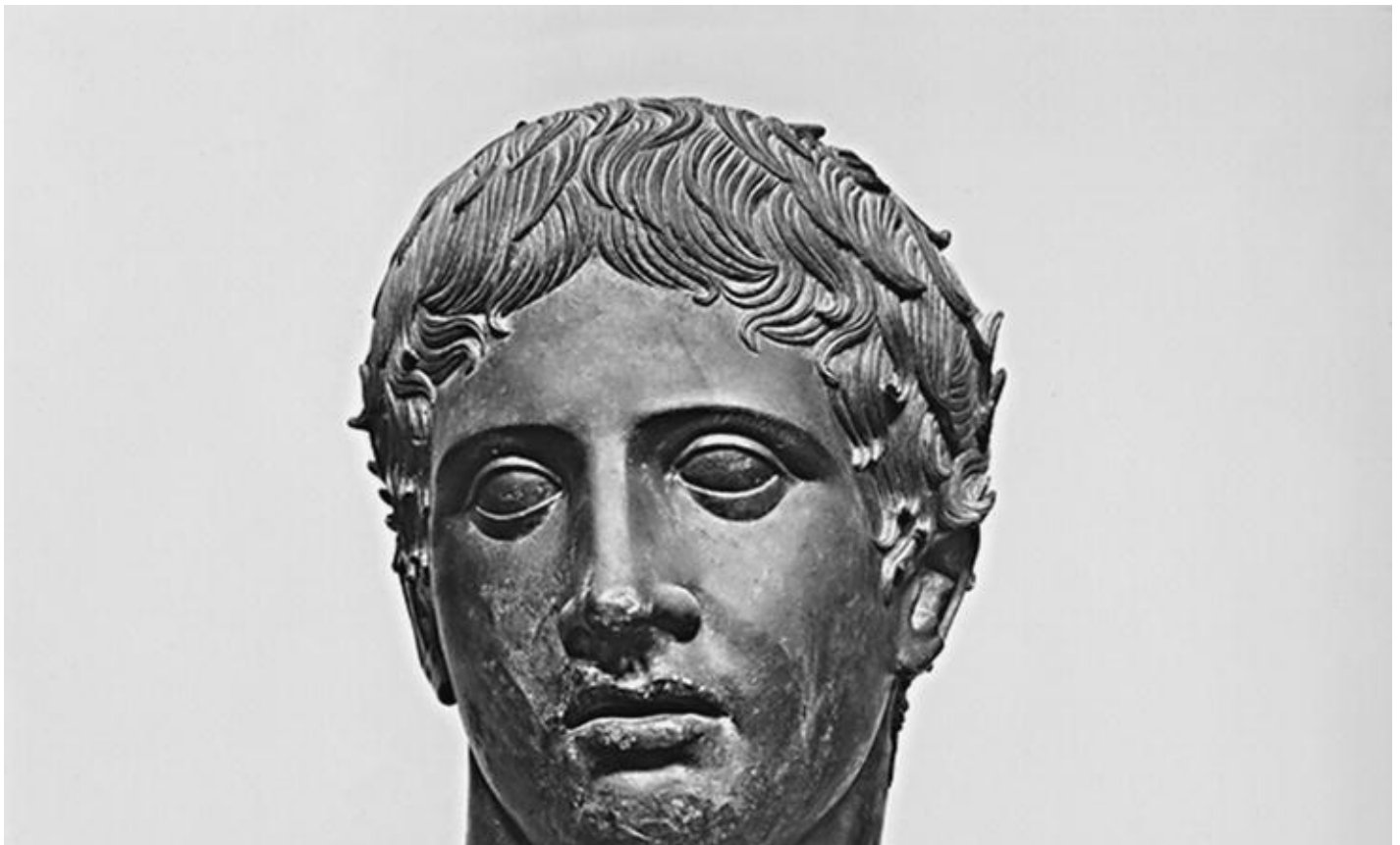




Figure 9.5 Bust after Polyclitus' *Doryphoros*, signed by "Apollonios, son of Archias, the Athenian," from the Villa of the Papyri. Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. 4885.

Photo: Reproduced by kind permission of the Archiv, Institut für Klassische Archäologie und Museum für Abgüsse Klassischer Bildwerke, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich.

Evidence like this suggests that such latter-day artists, whoever they might have been, were on some level acknowledged as the creators of the works displayed. Whether or not viewers were expected to recognize Apollonios' debt to Polyclitus, or indeed Glycon's to Lysippus, clients must have been happy with (or else oblivious to) the attribution—otherwise they would not have allowed it. The same can be said for other signed attributions, even when we cannot be sure about relations between "original" and purported "copy." We know nothing about the Aphrodisian sculptors named "Aristeas" and "Papias" who sign the so-called Furietti Centaurs from Hadrian's villa at Tivoli, for example, but the purchaser was surely content with the attribution; if not, there were always other sculptures and sculptors available (IG 14.1237; for references, see Kansteiner et al. 2014, 5.608–609, no. 4211; cf. Ridgway 2000, 282–283).

What can signatures like these tell us about the identities of their artists? Three points seem to me particularly important. First and foremost, all inscribed names are male (for a sole possible exception, see Kansteiner et al. 2014, 5.644–645, no. 4246). In one sense, this is hardly surprising: such were the gender biases of ancient Greek and Roman life. Yet there is in fact some tantalizing literary evidence for women painters in the Roman world. Pliny records the names of five earlier women painters, including a certain "Iaia of Cyzicus" whose early first-

century BCE paintings were said to have raised higher prices than those even of her most famous contemporaries (*Natural History* 35.147–148; cf. Kampen 1975; Muller-Dufeu 2011, 173–175; Kansteiner et al. 2014, 5.445–446, no. 4054). We might dismiss this as mere hearsay—or, at least, as the exception that proves the rule. However, it is interesting that of three Pompeian frescos that show painters at their easel, all depict female rather than male artists (for one example, see *PPM* 5.414, no. 9; cf. Goldman 1999, 29–31); there is also some interesting corroborative archaeological evidence from Roman Gaul, where one woman was even buried with encaustic painting equipment (in a tomb close to a Roman villa at St. Médard-des-Prés in the Loire: cf. Fillon 1849). Nevertheless, finds like this are exceptionally rare. As far as the (admittedly limited) epigraphic evidence is concerned, being a painter in the Roman world meant being male.

Second, the vast majority of the men who signed their work have Greek-sounding names. The sculptors mentioned earlier—Apollonios, Glycon, Aristetas, and Papias—are just four examples, and in each case geographical markers served to underline their Greek credentials (Apollonios and Glycon come from Athens, and Aristetas and Papias from Aphrodisias). There are countless comparanda here, and across different media. However, there are also noteworthy exceptions. Extant inscriptions yield a number of rather more Latinate names, suggesting their freedman status: in almost all artistic trades, we find some names presented in traditional Latin *tria nomina* form; one example is a certain Marcus Epidius Eros who signs a herm of Jupiter Ammon, maintaining a Greek *cognomen* (*CIL* 6.29799; cf. Calabi Limentani 1958, 160, no. 60). Even in Rome itself, though, Latin names are outnumbered by Greek. Whatever the artist’s first language, moreover, names are more often written in Greek than in Latin. Although “Felix” and “Gnaeus” are standard Latin names, we find both inscribed in Greek letters on imperial gems (Marvin 2008, 187; Vollenweider 1966, 43–44, 45–46). Indeed, it is significant that we know of no genuine, surviving intaglio signatures inscribed in Latin as opposed to Greek: either Greek was the first language of these craftsmen, or else it made better commercial sense for an artist to identify himself as more Greek than Roman (Zwierlein-Diehl 2005 provides an excellent survey of gem-cutter signatures; cf. Vollenweider 1966, 137–138).

Third, the very names of many inscribed signatures suggest something about social status. As we have said, most signatures suggest some sort of Greek origin. However, even those names that look more Latinate hint at humble backgrounds. Whatever we make of the aforementioned Marcus Epidius Eros, for example, “Eros” (“Desire”) was a typical Greek name for a slave (Stewart 2008, 17). Like other artists, Marcus Epidius Eros was most likely a freedman—a former slave who had worked his way out of servitude (in this case, working in the house of “Epidius”; cf. Burford 1972, 42–52). The same can be said in other fields of artistic production, not least among mosaicists (Donderer 1989, 47–49).

Nomenclature was not the only means of identifying oneself in signatures. As we have seen, it was common for artists to use geographical markers too. Athens recurs with particular frequency, followed by other artistic centers like Rhodes, Argos, and Aphrodisias; indeed, in his catalogue of Greek craftsmen inscriptions, Loewy lists more references to Athens than to any other city (Loewy 1885). Whatever the artist’s real origins or background, calling oneself

“Athenian” seems to have carried particular cultural sway, functioning as a sort of “badge of quality” (Thomas 2007, 326; cf. Toynbee 1951, 29–30).

Another mode of defining oneself revolved around patronymics—that is, inscribing not only one’s own name, but also the name of one’s father (cf. Donderer 1989, 47 on mosaicists). There is a long Greek precedent for such a practice: on the basis of surviving inscriptions, for example, Andrew Stewart has postulated a continuous dynasty of Athenian sculptors named “Praxiteles,” from the famous sculptor of the fourth century all the way through to the end of the first century BCE (Stewart 1979, 101–114, esp. 102–103, with appendix at 157–174; cf., e.g., Toynbee 1951, 18–20; Goodlett 1991, 676–678; Ling 2000, 91–92). Other comparable dynasties have been reconstructed across the Roman Empire (Russell 2013, 345–347); indeed, sometimes surviving inscriptions have allowed epigraphers to identify dynastic families of architects and sculptors in a single town (e.g., Dentzer 1985, 414n152 on materials from Sī in Syria). Among modern scholars, one of the most famous such family groups is associated with the “Rhodian” workshop to which Pliny attributes a statue of Laocoon and his sons. Pliny discusses the group in conjunction with sculptural collaboration: he tells us that the statue was crafted by three Rhodian sculptors, named Hagesander, Polydorus, and Athenodorus (*Natural History* 36.37). Although the famous surviving Laocoon group in the Vatican has no accompanying inscription, archaeologists uncovered another statue signed by the same (or at least an apparently related) trio of artists in 1957. Among the epic-inspired sculptural subjects displayed in the imperial seaside grotto at Sperlonga was a statue of Scylla attacking the ship of Odysseus, and on the tiller of Odysseus’ ship were inscribed (in Greek) the names not only of these artists, but also of their fathers: “Athenodorus son of Agesandros, Agesandros son of Paionios, and Polydoros son of Polydoros made it, all of them from Rhodes” (Fig. 20.4: Neudecker, [Chapter 20](#), this volume; cf. Pollitt 2000, 99–102; Kansteiner et al. 2014, 5.491–503, nos. 4106–4117). However we reconcile the epigraphic evidence from Sperlonga (and elsewhere) with Pliny’s literary testimony about the Laocoon, producing sculpture seems to have remained a family affair, passed on from one generation to another.

Other sculptors named their teachers rather than fathers, suggesting that sculptural workshops did not always run along straightforward familial lines (Fuchs 1999, 59–72). One such example is a statue of a young ephebe dating to the second half of the first century BCE, modeled after a severe classical prototype: the statue is signed by a certain “Stephanos,” who adds that he was “pupil [*mathêtês*] of Pasiteles” (IG 14.1261; Loewy 1885, 262, no. 374; Vollkommer 2001–2004, 1.420–422, s.v. “Stephanos”; Anguissola 2012, 82–84; Kansteiner et al. 2014, 5.159–161, nos. 3756–3758). Pasiteles was famous for sculpting an ivory cult statue of Jupiter in Rome, as well as for writing a treatise on “masterworks” or *nobilis opera* (*Natural History* 36.39–40, cf. Jex-Blake and Sellers 1968, lxxvii–lxxxii; Kleiner 1992, 29–31; Kansteiner et al. 2014, 5.154–159, nos. 3749–3755): Stephanos seems here to be advertising himself as a student of the celebrated first-century BCE artist. Still more interesting in this regard is a second signature, this time on a statue sometimes thought to depict “Orestes and Electra” (Figure 9.6): the “Menelaos” who signed the group claimed to be the “pupil” (*mathêtês*) not of Pasiteles, but this time of Stephanos himself (IG 14.1251; Loewy 1885, 263, no. 375; Ridgway 2002, 189–90; Vollkommer 2001–2004, 1.148, s.v. “Cossutius Menelaos”;

Thomas 2007, 326–327; Kansteiner et al. 2014, 5.153–154, nos. 3747–3748). The inevitable question presents itself: Are we dealing here with a continuous line of masters and pupils?



Figure 9.6 So-called “Orestes and Electra” marble group signed by “Menelaos, pupil of Stephanos.” Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. 6006.

Photo: Reproduced by kind permission of the Archiv, Institut für Klassische Archäologie und Museum für Abgüsse Klassischer Bildwerke, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich.

Conclusion: Fake-it *Fecits*?

This chapter has painted a decidedly ambivalent portrait of Roman artists. The various literary, archaeological, and epigraphic sources discussed construct a somewhat contradictory picture. On the one hand, the concept of the creative sculptor and painter was important for Roman late Republican and imperial writers. Whatever else we make of the proverbial references to the likes of Pheidias, Myron, and Apelles, artists were evidently “good to think with”: if being a sculptor was a wholly mundane and banausic profession, why expend so much intellectual energy in recording anecdotes about artists and their achievements? On the other hand, contemporary artists do not seem to have shared in the reflected glory of their mythologized Greek forebears. For all their admiration of the Greek greats of old, Roman authors did not show the same sorts of respect toward contemporary craftsmen.

Yet is there any evidence for latter-day artists *themselves* alluding to elite concepts of artistic creativity? Did Roman artists understand their art as humble craftsmanship? Or could they lay claim to a more privileged sort of *technê*, one bound up with the great artists of the Greek past? Most scholars have answered these questions in relation to the funerary inscriptions discussed earlier in the chapter. Having recourse to the testimonies about “Zenon” and “Novius Blesamus,” for example, Eberhard Thomas has concluded in favor of the Roman imperial artist’s “distinct feeling of self-worth” (*ausgeprägtes Selbstwertgefühl*: Thomas 2007, 337; cf. Toynbee 1951, 54–56).

I end this chapter by taking a slightly different approach. Like Thomas, I want to return to the issue of signatures. Rather than take these inscriptions at their word, however, I wonder whether we might not use them to rethink *how* sculptors conceptualized their status in the Roman world. As we have said, most Roman signatures have been taken at face value—as straightforward evidence of dynasties and workshops. According to this logic, Stephanos really *was* Pasiteles’ student, and the numerous “Praxiteleses” known to us really were descended from a single family of sculptors. However, I think that there might just be a more complex story to tell: a story of craftsmen who could sometimes knowingly take on pseudo-identities (cf. Squire 2011, 291–300 and 2013, esp. 370–385).

That contemporary artists could adopt the names of their more illustrious forebears is clear from not only contemporary texts, but also extant material culture (Fuchs 1999, 44–52; Anguissola 2012, 146–150; cf. Aghion and Hellmann 1991 on ancient and modern forgeries more generally). The first-century CE poet Phaedrus demonstrates as much, complaining about how today’s artists pass off their own sculptures and paintings as works by “Myron,” “Praxiteles,” or “Zeuxis,” all in an effort to drive up the price (*Fables* 5.pr.4–9; cf. Loewy 1885, 319; Friedländer 1881, 3.271–275; Henderson 2001, 151–162; Peirano 2012, 51–52).

Phaedrus is talking of knowing and deliberate forgeries here, but there is considerable material evidence to corroborate the general culture of playing with names: we know of some five “Myrons” working in imperial Italy, for example, as well as a “Phidias” who attributes to himself a wholly non-Greek statue of the Egyptian deity Thoth (Burford 1972, 210–211; Stewart 2008, 21–22); similarly, a clothed statue of Aphrodite and Cupid in the Louvre, which passes itself off as a “Praxiteles,” has little to do stylistically with that fourth-century sculptor (Fuchs 1999, 48–50; Kansteiner et al. 2014, 3.192–193, no. 1997).

Patronymics could, at least in theory, be used in related capacities. Surviving inscriptions mention numerous purported “sons” of Myron, Scopas, and Polygnotus (Squire 2013, 377–378); this alone might be grounds for questioning the “real” identities of those proclaiming to be “Athenodorus, Agesandros and Polydorus” at Sperlonga. Regardless of biographical truth, details about name or family relations could serve as nifty pieces of self-advancement: just as modern gallery-goers often ponder the name of a painter before passing judgment on its quality, we might think that signatures had at least the potential to appeal to an elite viewer’s art-historical knowledge. The same might possibly be said for the aforementioned “Stephanos” and “Menelaos” inscriptions: the Greek term translated as “pupil” (*mathêtês*) in fact allows for a plurality of scenarios; at the most basic level, it simply refers to someone who has “learned” from Pasiteles (which may not, of course, mean any strict “apprenticeship”; cf. Kreikenbom 1999, 344–345).

No less interesting is the evidence of gem signatures. Most ancient intaglios go unsigned, but among the few gem cutters known to us, especially from the early Roman Empire, are a host of unlikely looking names. While, as we have said, all of these inscriptions are written in Greek, several also allude to the names of celebrated Greek artists in other media: “Sostratus,” “Pheidias,” “Scopas,” “Polyclitus,” “Pamphilus” (Squire 2011, 297–300). Whoever these artists “really” were, and whatever they were “really” called, names like these might impress an artistic connection between different media, and in all manner of creative and playful ways. Indeed, one might compare here the fifteenth-century Italian engraver who likewise declared (in Greek) his Renaissance medals to be “a work of the younger Lysippus” (Waldman 2000).

That ancient artists at least *could* play on a viewer’s art-historical knowledge is best demonstrated by a group of marble reliefs called *Tabulae Iliacae*, or “Iliac tablets” (Squire 2011, 283–302). There are 22 such reliefs surviving and (with one notable exception) all seem to have been crafted in the late first century BCE or early first century CE. Most of them depict scenes from Greek epic (accompanied with apposite Greek inscriptions), and all are crafted to truly minuscule proportions. [Figure 9.7](#) is just one example. Although barely larger than an A4 sheet, the tablet is crowded with over 200 figures, and the right-hand pilaster contains 108 lines of text (each letter just over 1 millimeter in height). Particularly interesting for our purpose is the object’s signature. In total, six tablets associate themselves with someone or something “Theodorean,” and most often with what they call “Theodorean *technê*”—that is, with the “craftsmanship” of a certain Theodorus (in the case of [Figure 9.7](#), the name was inscribed in an elegiac couplet in the upper frame of the lower central band). Although this was a very common name (literally meaning “god-given”), it seems no coincidence that ancient art’s most famous “Theodorus” was an archaic artist from Samos—a sculptor renowned,

among other things, for his miniature craftsmanship (cf. Kansteiner et al. 2014, 1.183–202, nos. 267–293). One of Theodorus' works, writes Pliny, was a particular "marvel of miniaturization": a self-portrait that held a miniature chariot so small that a "fly would cover it with his wings" (*Natural History* 34.83; cf. Posidippus 67 A–B). Of course, the Iliac tablets are half a millennium later than this legendary Samian Theodorus in date. And yet, given their knowing miniaturism—and their broader claims to *technê* ("craftsmanship") and *sophia* ("cleverness," "wisdom," indeed "poetry": Squire 2011, 87–126)—the attribution arguably forged a connection with that celebrated archaic artist. Perhaps this explains the unusual adjectival form: the inscription does not read "Theodorus made it," but instead declares that the *technê* is "Theodorean," using an adjective form that is fairly common in literary texts, but unparalleled in other Greek and Latin artist inscriptions. Whatever the real identity of the artist or his entourage, the very form of the inscription could perhaps have functioned as an allusion to one of antiquity's most celebrated miniaturist masters. Were viewers—or at least, viewers from the upper echelons of Roman high society—intended to read the descriptive adjective as a high-brow, connoisseurial reference?

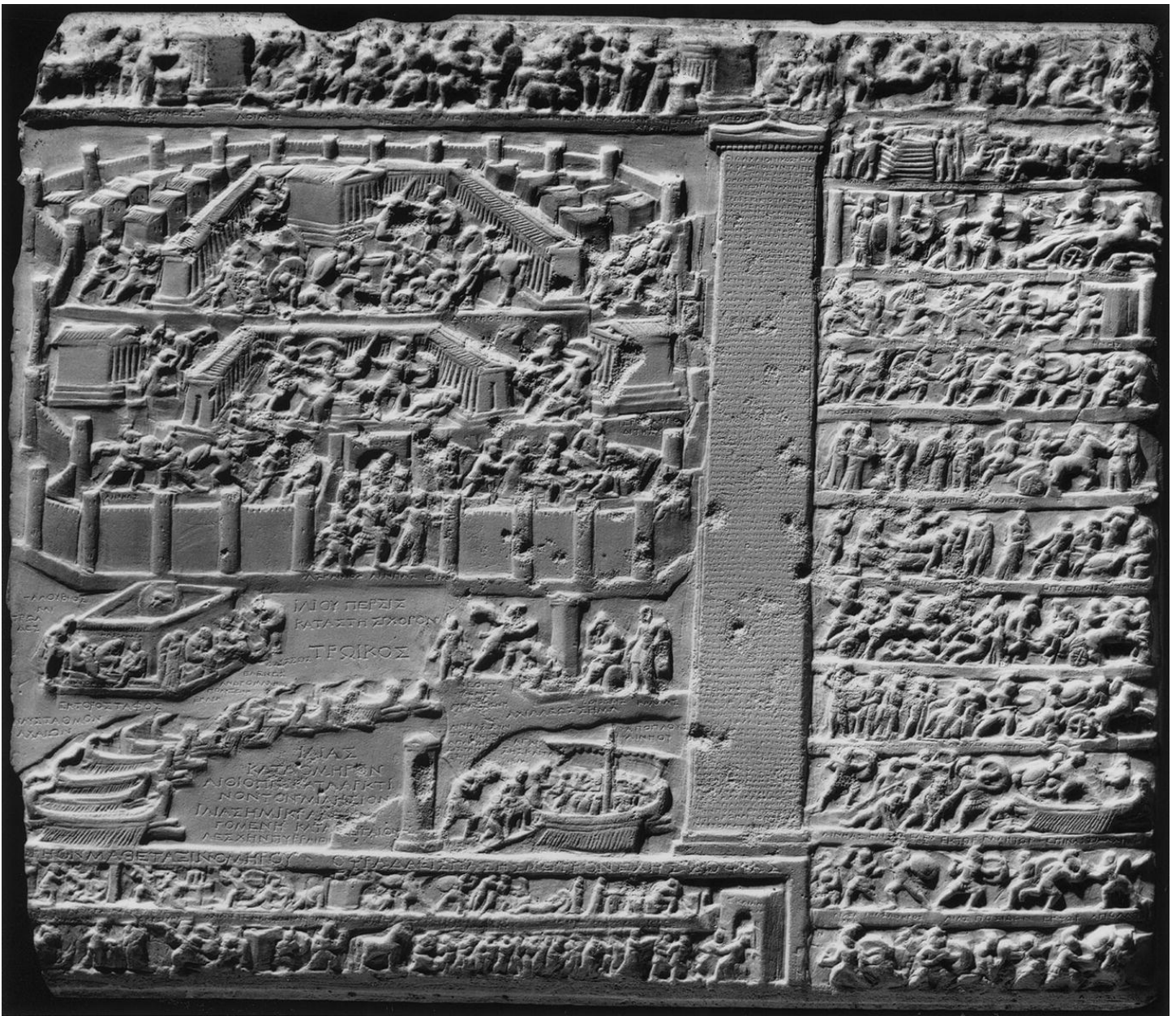


Figure 9.7 Marble “Iliac tablet” (*Tabula Iliaca Capitolina*), late first century BCE/early first century CE. Rome, Capitoline Museums, Sala delle Colombe inv. 83.

Photo: Michael Squire, by kind permission of the Direzione, Musei Capitolini, Rome.

Interpreted in this way, artist signatures might perhaps help to reconstruct a different image for the laboring Roman artist. Poor and struggling he might have been, but the humble craftsman could nevertheless tap into more learned discourses about the canonical master sculptors of Greek antiquity. This was not merely a matter of making a fast buck—of passing one’s own work off as someone else’s—it could also prove a question of self-definition. The comparison (or indeed self-identification) with earlier artists granted an opportunity for latter-day craftsmen to forge a particular sort of self-image, equating the modern-day artist with the legendary masters of old: “as sculptor, I blossomed no less than Praxiteles,” as an imperial Greek inscription beneath a funerary relief of a 16-year-old sculptor from Miletus puts it (*IG* II/III².9611: Loewy 1885, 375–376, no. 550; Toynbee 1951, 27; Vollkommer 2001–2004,

1.247, s.v. “Eutychides (V)”); Thomas 2007, 329; Kansteiner et al. 2014, 3.205, no. 2027).

We may not know much about Roman artists. In terms of textual sources, moreover, we know much less about them than we do about their earlier classical Greek counterparts. Nonetheless, inscriptions like these suggest a degree of pride and reflection. Some artists perhaps *did* conceive of their profession in the elevated terms of their Greek forebears: like Gombrich, they perhaps recognized that, without their laboring contributions, there could be no Roman art at all.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

The best recent Anglophone introduction to the question of who made Roman art is Stewart (2008, 10–38); Claridge (2015) and Vollkommer (2015) were published while this book was in proofs, but also offer useful introductory overviews. More detailed surveys include Toynbee (1951), Calabi Limentani (1958), Burford (1972, esp. 207–218), Coarelli (1980), Chevallier (1991, esp. 66–102, restricted to ancient textual sources), Ling (2000), Thomas (2007), Marvin (2008, 168–247); readers are also referred to a supplement of the *Journal of Roman Archaeology* dedicated to “*ateliers* and artisans in Roman art and archaeology” (Kristensen and Poulsen 2012, with the survey introduction by Kristensen). More generally on changing concepts of the artists between the Greek and Roman worlds, the best guide is Tanner (2006, esp. 279–301).

For a concise survey of workshops and technology in the (mostly earlier) Greek world, see Hasaki (2012); Russell (2013) offers an expert guide to the quarrying, transport, and carving of all forms of Roman stonework, discussing both the carving of Roman sarcophagi (256–310) and the complex process of statue production (311–351). Also hugely valuable here is an online project on “The Art of Making in Antiquity: Stoneworking in the Roman World” (www.artofmaking.ac.uk), which contains detailed essays, videos, and photographic resources on the practicalities of Roman sculptural production.

For some attempts to reconstruct the artists behind specific monuments or classes of Roman objects, see for example Bianchi Bandinelli (1950) on those responsible for Trajan’s Forum, Kleiner (1977) on an itinerant workshop in Gaul, Conlin (1997, 27–44) on the Ara Pacis, and Richardson (2000) on Campanian painters. Other studies are dedicated to those responsible for specific media: on mosaicists, see especially Balmelle and Darmon (1986), Donderer (1989, esp. 39–50 and 2008), and Dunbabin (1999, 269–278); on architects, Gros (1983) and Donderer (1996) are particularly important; on the organization of Pompeian painter

workshops, see for example Esposito (2009, esp. 21–47, and 2011) and Malgieri (2013), with detailed bibliographic reviews. On the social status of the Roman artist more generally, see especially Calabi Limentani (1958, 9–60, esp. 43–60); for the fascinating evidence of “symbolic” and monogram sculptural signatures, see Donderer 2000–2001.

On named individual artists in antiquity, one might consult Vollkommer (2001–2004), a two-volume dictionary of artists specified in literary and epigraphic sources. Many of the most important textual sources are collected in Stewart (1990, 1.237–310), although Pollitt (1983 and 1990) are also helpful on Greek and Roman artistic sources and documents more generally. As for artist inscriptions, Loewy (1885) is still the best resource; also useful are Overbeck (1868, esp. 427–476, an anthology of Greek and Latin literary sources), Giuliano (1953), Calabi Limentani (1958, 151–180), Guarducci (1974, 377–561), and *IGUR* 4, 1–116, nos. 1491–1656. More generally on the history of artist inscriptions in western art, see the essays in Hegener (2013).

A monumental (and long-anticipated) new anthology of literary and epigraphic sources about Greek artists appeared while this book was in production, complete with German commentaries and translations of Greek and Latin sources: *Der neue Overbeck* (Kansteiner et al. 2014) offers a fully revised, five-volume catalogue of the texts and inscriptions of Overbeck (1868) and Loewy (1885), while also including many important discoveries since the late nineteenth century; the fifth volume deals with texts and inscriptions pertaining to late Hellenistic, Augustan, early imperial, mid-imperial, and late imperial sculptors and painters (complete with an index of many—but by no means all—of the individuals discussed in this chapter on pp. 677–689).

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CHAPTER 10

Roman Art and the State

Peter J. Holliday

Romans commissioned private and public monuments to represent the state, the *res publica*, to themselves and others. Patrons ranged from emperors to freedmen, from elites in the capital to citizens in the provinces. Both the patron and intended viewers determined the nature of artistic programs. Literate viewers could read dedicatory inscriptions, but a visual political rhetoric of figural imagery addressed a larger and more diverse audience. Examination of specific examples shows how they display representations of military triumph, the execution of civic duty, and the fulfillment of religious obligation. Such study in turn reveals the distinctive needs of Roman patrons and helps us reconstruct a particular political context for their meaning. Creative innovations in iconography and depiction helped Romans negotiate the complex transition from Republic to Empire.

The Republican Background

Roman leaders had traditionally sought power through lucrative military commands, and used the money raised from their booty (*manubiae*) to erect monuments to commemorate their achievements on behalf of the state and thereby shape a self-image to influence their peers and the electorate. Although ancient literature indicates that the increased political use of art distinguishes the late Republic from earlier periods, scant material survives: paintings proved ephemeral and later imperial projects erased earlier works. Highly sophisticated techniques of Greek rhetoric were among the cultural spoils introduced into Rome in the late Republic; members of the Greek-educated Roman elite recognized how the artful and eloquent usage of language could persuade an audience to a particular point of view; in a similar manner they promoted the creation of a visual rhetoric to advance their personal and political programs. Drawing on varied artistic traditions to implement their commemorative objectives, Roman patrons cultivated a visual rhetoric most akin to panegyric, what the Romans termed *laudatio*, denoting a didactic purpose to celebrate that which was worthy of praise (Pollini 1995). It is actually doubtful that Romans considered many of these monuments art (according to our modern sense of the term); rather, the rhetoric of their figural imagery took its place within a larger discourse of power and ideology.

The late Republic was thus a period of innovation and creativity that yielded strikingly heterogeneous artistic types to glorify individuals. The reliefs decorating a monumental base for a cult statue group commissioned by the censor Marcus Antonius early in the first century BCE are exemplary ([Figure 10.1](#)); they joined countless other triumphal monuments competing for attention in the Circus Flaminius (Kuttner 1993; Holliday 2002, 161–166). A frieze of eastern Greek marble featuring a mythological marine procession, full of Hellenistic drama, was recut to decorate three sides of the base, functioning as *manubiae* and artfully alluding to

the dedicant's naval victories. The main face is carved in a more sober style from a different marble. It combines three different episodes: a scene of census-taking, a lustral sacrifice, and the religious procession preceding the sacrifice. Whereas the participants in the census and *suovetaurilia* sacrifice (of sheep, pig, and bull) are all anonymous types, the sacrificant betrays portrait-like features, ensuring that Romans would recognize the historical personage responsible for these achievements—and the monument commemorating them. The censorial *lustrum* takes place before the war god Mars, identified by his distinctive armor. Roman *triumphatores* suggested that they enjoyed a special relationship with the patron deities to whom they donated their *spolia*: inspired by the model of Hellenistic monarchs, they were portrayed mingling with divinities as intimate companions (*comites*). This manner of representation evokes the *encomium* of divine favor and became a standard part of Roman self-fashioning for men of superior achievement. These reliefs commemorated both Antonius' military achievements as a general and the fulfillment of his civic and religious duties as a magistrate, their rhetorical structure linking these facets of distinguished service to the state. They also provide a precedent for the self-glorification of Sulla, Pompey, Caesar, and ultimately Augustus (Holliday 2002, 1–21).



Figure 10.1 Marcus Antonius Base (so-called Altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus), early first century BCE. Paris, Louvre, inv. MA 975.

Photo: Jastrow (2007)/Wikimedia Commons.

Other monuments celebrated success in one specific sphere. A statue of a general found at Tivoli is representative of a type that decorated public spaces in Italic cities ([Figure 10.2](#)). Here the artist purposely drew on conflicting artistic styles in order to communicate effectively to contemporary viewers and posterity the commanding military power (*imperium*) and brute force (*potestas*) of this unidentified Roman commander, combining a super-realistic, or veristic, portrait head bearing the characteristic signs of age with a highly idealized, nearly nude body type that likens the general to a Greek hero. A Roman military cloak (*paludamentum*) preserves his modesty, which with the Greek anatomical cuirass at his foot denotes the martial nature of his achievements. The cuirass statue was a Greek invention adopted by the successors of Alexander and subsequently by Roman generals to honor themselves after successful campaigns; the cuirass and *paludamentum* would together make up the uniform of Roman commanders in commemorative art right up to late antiquity (Hannestad 1986, 34). The attributes of the so-called Arringatore provide a contrasting rhetorical type ([Figure 10.3](#)). An inscription in Etruscan letters identifies him as Aulus Metellus. He holds his right arm, accurately restored, in the standard Roman gesture of address (*adlocutio*). The rigidity of this work contrasts with the full, Hellenistic modeling of the Tivoli general. Perhaps a senator, his short republican toga signifies that he carries the burdens of civic authority rather

than military command.



Figure 10.2 General from Tivoli, c. 75–50 BCE; (H 1.88 m); Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, inv. 106513.

Photo: Faraglia, Neg. D-DAI-Rom 1932.412.



Figure 10.3 The “Arringatore” (Aulus Metellus), c. 90–70 BCE; (H 1.80 m). Florence, Museo Archeologico, inv. 3.

Photo: Koppermann, Neg. D-DAI-Rom 1963.0606.

Roman leaders could promote their political agenda to an even larger and geographically dispersed audience—in particular to the army—with coinage. Rome did not strike coins until after the Pyrrhic Wars in southern Italy (281–272 BCE), more than two centuries after Greece did. Roman moneyers initially struck types featuring their emblems in an abbreviated manner, but as the political situation deteriorated personal glorification began to exceed traditional republican restraint, and private emblems eclipsed those of the state, including even the name of Roma herself (Hannestad 1986, 18). When Julius Caesar usurped all power in 44 BCE and made himself dictator for life (*dictator perpetuus*), the Senate voted to make him the first living Roman to be portrayed on the state coinage. His portrait appears with the titles and insignia of his diverse magistracies and priesthoods, but on all of them Caesar wears a distinctive wreath, possibly the *corona aurea* of Jupiter. Although an appropriate attribute of a *triumphator*, it had also been worn by Roman kings. Caesar wore the wreath at the *Lupercalia* in February 44 BCE when Marc Antony presented—and Caesar refused—the Hellenistic diadem of kingship. On the Ides of March that year, Caesar was assassinated in the Senate.

Artistic production in the late Republic was thus driven by Rome’s highly competitive political and social milieu, and shaped by the full panoply of artistic stimuli that Roman generals brought home with them. From the time of Marius and Sulla, Roman aristocrats competed ever more fiercely, leading to the breakdown of the oligarchic structure of the republican state. The dissolution of traditional cohesion profoundly affected all forms of political self-representation, which in artistic commissions had previously maintained an essential equivalence. With the *triumvirs* traditional constraints fell away, and immense projects like the theater of Pompey and Forum Iulium competed—and clashed—in their scale and grandeur (Zanker 2010, 54). The Augustan Principate (r. 27 BCE–14 CE) marked the pivotal period during which Rome acquired a monumental art commensurate with its new importance, but also one with a coherent system of images, perceptively described by Paul Zanker as *die Macht der Bilder* (Zanker 1988).

The Augustan Principate

After completing the extravagant building program initiated by Caesar, Augustus proceeded to augment it with larger and ever more expensive monuments. Although Augustus promoted broad support for construction, he often financed it himself. The aristocracy’s monetary base was exhausted, which may account for its failure both to participate in those programs and to become involved in matters of state, further hastening Augustus’s consolidation of power. Augustan art did not follow a clear master plan. Initially the forms used to celebrate the victor after Actium remained the same bases and trophies employed by the leading men of the late Republic; honorific statues continued the traditional types of military and civic portraits. Augustan artists refined the ongoing appropriation of Greek culture in order to express

concepts and predilections that were already widespread. As in Augustan poetry, traditional imagery was revived and reintroduced, but with contemporary significance in relation to the new political system.

Even earlier objects were redeployed. Thus, the reused Greek amazonomachy sculptures on the Temple of Apollo Sosianus, which had originally symbolized the Greek victory over the eastern Persians, now alluded to Augustus's victory over eastern Cleopatra (La Rocca 1985). The new imagery of leadership responded to a period of political crisis by emphasizing the transformative nature of the head of the Roman state, now fashioned as the *princeps*, the "first citizen," in keeping with the rhetoric and ideology of the Roman republican system in which power lay with the Senate and People's Assembly. In contrast to his predecessors, Augustus emphasized that his position as *princeps* was due to authority (*auctoritas*) rather than brute *imperium* or *potestas*. He was *auctor perpetuus* rather than the *dictator perpetuus* that his adopted father had endeavored to be. Augustus' idealized portrait appeared on all his coinage, which is indicative of a development that would recur repeatedly as the state moved toward absolutism: an act judged initially by contemporaries as audacious, such as Caesar's placing his own portrait on the state coinage, was soon fully acceptable.

Roman religion was intimately bound up with memory, politics, and power—and integral to the fabric of the social and political life of Rome—since it was believed that the state could function and prosper only by maintaining the "peace of the gods" (*pax deorum*). For the gods to grant the state victory, peace, and prosperity, Romans had to render them proper care through sacrifice and pious devotion. Roman religion had become completely disordered in the late Republic. Temples were dilapidated; religious observances and obligations were neglected. Ancient sources describe Rome's religious confusion as symptomatic of the state's disorder. Augustus' religious policies demonstrate his *auctoritas* in action, both elevating the *princeps* and propagating the new order. He not only appeared to respond to the needs of late Republican society, he also sought to reinvigorate Roman traditions. His refortifying and ennobling of such sodalities as the *Fratres Arvales* helped mend a society unraveled by civil strife; he filled the position of the *flamen dialis*, which had been vacant from 87 until just after he became *pontifex maximus* in 12 BCE; he dramatically closed the temple of Janus; he took the *augurium salutis*; and he produced the Secular Games of 17 BCE. He restored 83 temples and erected 12 new ones, and the use of Luna marble gave them a certain *magnificentia*. The Temple of Concordia was refashioned as that of Concordia Augusta, and he encouraged the building of shrines to virtues and abstractions celebrating the new order, including Victoria Augusta, Pax Augusta, Iustitia Augusta, Ops Augusta, and Fortuna Redux (which commemorated his return from the provinces and was also celebrated on a coin of ca. 19 BCE).

In its form, material, scale, and most importantly in its richly complex figural decoration, the Ara Pacis Augustae, or Altar of Augustan Peace, gave consummate monumental expression to the rhetoric of the nascent Empire, a rhetoric emphasizing the divinely ordained foundation of the Roman state and the ideology that secured it, including Augustus' role as its *princeps*, all articulated in the language of classicism ([Figures 10.4–10.5](#); Moretti 1948; Simon 1963; Buchner 1976). Ordered by the Senate to commemorate Augustus' return to Rome from military

success in Spain and Gaul in 13 BCE (*Res Gestae* 12), through its physical presence and as the locus for annual public sacrifices, the Ara Pacis made manifest the end of the bloody conflicts of the late Republic. A large precinct wall with doors on the east and west sides encloses the altar itself, a form closely paralleling the Altar of the Twelve Gods of fifth-century Athens, a “golden age” now fashioned as a precedent for Augustan civilization. Sculpted reliefs link the primary theme of peace with imagery denoting the importance of Roman religion as a civilizing force, while also advancing the dynastic claims of the *princeps*’ family and promoting his social policies.



Figure 10.4 Ara Pacis Augustae, western and northern faces, 13–9 BCE; (c. 12 × 10.7 m).

Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY.



Figure 10.5 Ara Pacis Augustae, eastern and southern faces, 13–9 BCE.

Photo: Gianni Dagli Orti/The Art Archive at Art Resource, NY.

Rectangular figurative panels flank the doorways at either end of the exterior walls. Those on the west end illustrate the legendary founders of Rome. The poorly preserved northwest panel represents the Lupercalia, the discovery of the twins Romulus and Remus by the shepherd Faustulus, watched over by Mars. Mars was the father of Romulus, and, as stated in the prophecy in Virgil's *Aeneid*, an ancestor of Augustus. He articulates the necessity of war to establish peace. On the southwest panel other legendary ancestors claimed by Augustus, Aeneas accompanied by his son Iulus-Ascanius, sacrifice to their household gods (*penates*) after landing in Italy; the victim, a sow, is a reference to the prophecy in the *Aeneid* that the hero would find a sow beneath an oak tree on his arrival (*adventus*) in Latium. (Paul Rehak [2006] reintroduced the idea that the figure might instead represent Numa, but this interpretation has not gained acceptance.) As *pater* of both the Julian family and Rome, Aeneas' *pietas* demonstrates his reverence for his family traditions, just as the altar demonstrates the *pietas* of Augustus. Taken together, the two western panels emphasize two dominant roles that the *princeps* must play: Mars alludes to his role as leader of the Roman army (*imperator*) and Aeneas to his role as *pontifex maximus* of the Roman state religion.

The reliefs on the east end of the precinct wall depict classical allegorical figures. The fragmentary northeast panel contains a badly preserved scene of a seated female warrior

(*bellatrix*). Using coins, Edmund Buchner (1976) and other scholars have restored her as Roma sitting on enemy weapons and accompanied by two figures identified as the personifications of *Honos* (Honor) and *Virtus* (Excellence). The southeast panel displays a personification identified as *Tellus* (Earth), *Italia*, or even *Pax*. The two children in her lap along with the flora and fauna allude to the prosperity ensured by the new order, and the female figures with billowing mantles flanking her represent sea and land breezes. Significantly, the two northern panels on the east and west ends feature martial imagery, while the southern panels are more pacific. The four panels signify four major themes of Augustan ideology: piety and reverence for tradition (Aeneas sacrificing), war as the bringer of peace (Mars with Romulus and Remus), victory (Roma with Honos and Virtus), and the prosperity of the *Pax Augusta* (Tellus-Italia with the bounty of land and sea).

Reliefs in the upper register of the long north and south sides of the precinct walls depict figures processing toward the west in a ceremony to celebrate the *Pax Augusta*. These figures include lictors carrying *fascēs*, who serve as ceremonial bodyguards of magistrates, priests, portraits of women and children (generally from the imperial family), and attendants necessary for religious purposes. The south frieze features the poorly preserved figure of Augustus ([Figure 2.4](#)). He wears his toga with mantle drawn over the head (*capite velato*), indicating his performance of a religious rite that echoes the figure of the sacrificing Aeneas. Marcus Agrippa, Augustus's son-in-law and then likely successor, appears toward the center of the frieze. The participation in the ceremony of two or three non-Roman children, indicated by their foreign costume, announces to all that Rome is now the center of the world. The figures on the north frieze feature additional members of the imperial family and dignitaries who met Augustus on his return to Rome, including that senatorial elite shrewdly credited by Augustus for commissioning the altar, and represented here alongside the *princeps* playing a prominent role in the new state.

There are other classical echoes in addition to the altar's form. Scholars have long noted that the composition of the processional scenes seems to parallel the Parthenon's depiction of the Panathenaic Procession, and how the Roman artists assimilated the Greek classical style to convey the solemnity of the Roman rite. Yet, the citizens shown in the Panathenaic Procession are generic types participating in a recurring ceremony, whereas the Ara Pacis represents historical personages participating in a specific event. The seemingly documentary technique of the Roman monument contrasts with the archetypal approach of the Greek work. The Ara Pacis thus exemplifies the new or reinvented artistic vocabulary that arose to serve the *princeps*, an individual whose person would eventually become identified with the state. Furthermore, the intermingling of male and female and children and adults on the Ara Pacis evokes the theme of family, its role in Augustan social policy, and political life. Since Augustus claimed descent from Romulus and Aeneas, the emphasis on the imperial family asserts their dynastic claims as the first family and rightful rulers of Rome. The figural imagery of the Ara Pacis made the complexities of Augustan ideology accessible on some level to many viewers; its impressive marble and superb carving were evident to all. Successive emperors strove to match its effective magnificence.

Public and private are deeply intertwined in the Roman state religion, and Augustan

monuments exploited this conflation. The public, although not the official (i.e., state-sanctioned), worship of the *genius* of the *princeps* originated at Rome under Augustus. As *pontifex maximus*, Augustus reorganized the cult of the *Lares compitales* (guardians of the crossroads) between 12 and 7 BCE. Although the associations (*collegia*) that oversaw the cult had once provoked social disorder, through Augustus' involvement they became instruments of social reorganization. The magistrates of the imperial cult (*Augustales*) consisted largely of wealthy freedmen and women who formed the basis of a new middle class. By focusing on the Lares, Augustus was able to combine his personal *genius*, the divine procreative spirit that every Roman male possessed, with the *genius pater familias*: even as the father was the head of the family, so Augustus was the father and head of the state. (The embracing of the official title *pater patriae* in 2 BCE was a natural consequence.) Libations were poured to the *Genius Augusti* at all public and private banquets beginning in 30 BCE (Cassius Dio 51.19.7). Statuettes of the *Lares Augusti* and of the *Genius Augusti*, which was also now venerated in the new cult, were set up with modest altars in each of the 265 *vici*, or districts, of Rome (Lott 2004). Surviving altars include one in the Conservatori Museum dedicated by the *magistri* of the Vicus Asculetus, one in the Uffizi from the Vicus Sandalarius, and one formerly in the Belvedere of the Vatican Museum ([Figure 10.6](#)). Their imagery demonstrates that individuals outside Rome's ruling elite also shaped the evolving visual rhetoric.





Figure 10.6 Belvedere Altar, 12–2 BCE (H 0.95 m). Rome, Vatican Museum, Museo Gregoriano Profano, inv. 1115.

Photo: Rossa, Neg. D-DAI-Rom 1975.1291, 1975.1292.

The four sides of the Belvedere Altar promote Augustus' political and social policies while honoring his new position as head of the Roman state religion (Zanker 1969). The front side depicts a rocky setting with a pair of laurel trees, suggesting Augustus' Palatine residence. A flying Victory sets a shield inscribed with his new title, *pontifex maximus*, on a pillar, indicating that the altar was made after 12 BCE (cf. Ovid *Fasti* 3.415–428). On the opposite side four horses draw a chariot toward the heavens, personified by Caelus with his celestial mantle at the right and the horses of the sun god at the left. The chariot holds a semi-nude male figure with mantle, now headless. A fragmentary male in toga at the left and a woman with two small boys at the right, also now headless, salute the ascending figure. The scene is generally identified as one of apotheosis, but the identity of the protagonists is debated. The figure in the chariot may represent Julius Caesar, the male at the left Augustus, and the woman at the right Livia; most likely the two boys are his young grandsons, Gaius and Lucius Caesar. Wearing the toga of civic and religious leadership, Augustus has assumed Aeneas' mantle to guide Rome under the auspices of his divine patron, Apollo (represented by the solar chariot). The depiction of Livia, possibly in the guise of Venus, with two potential successors represents dynastic hopes for the future. In 2 BCE both youths were still alive, and this closely knit family group, witnessing the apotheosis of Augustus' adoptive father, stresses the emperor's social policies (Kleiner 1992, 102–103). The Caesarian imagery at this date is not surprising, for the Belvedere Altar is contemporary with the construction of the Forum of Augustus that honored the *Divus Iulius* with its Temple of Mars Ultor, pledged before Philippi, and the display of his cult statue. A third side depicts the seer Helenus and Aeneas' discovery of the Lavinian sow, conflating two prophetic episodes related by Virgil. Finally, the fourth side represents Augustus presenting the *Lares Augusti* to the attendants of the street magistrates (*vicomagistri*), the fulfillment of the prophesied foundation of Rome and its fruition under pious Aeneas and

the Julian family.

The magistrates who dedicated this small neighborhood shrine were therefore as determined to portray themselves as participants in the new order as were the senators represented on the more monumental Ara Pacis. That they drew from the same repertory of imagery used in official monuments (including allusions to Augustus's dynastic claims) to articulate their investment in Augustan policies reinforces their commitment to the ideology that had given them status, and further underscores that official and public were not necessarily synonymous concepts. Thus, for example, monuments memorializing the virtues of deceased private individuals were surely not official, although they were erected beside roads outside cities for maximum public display. Likewise, Suetonius (*Augustus* 59) tells us that funds were collected to set up a statue of the physician Antonius Musa beside that of the god of medicine Aesclepius, because Musa had saved Augustus' life, indicating that the rhetoric of pairing mortals with divinities as *comites* was also embraced by non-elites. The lack of clarity distinguishing public from private and official from unofficial among various commissions facilitated the encroachment of an imperial cult, a crucial aspect of the evolving Roman polity.

The emperor's escalation to divinity was incremental. Of prime importance was the deification of Julius Caesar, the first historical Roman to be officially voted divine status. In the politically unstable milieu of the late Republic, Augustus could claim the unique status of *divi filius*, "son of the deified one," effectively reinforced by the frequent repetition of the titular DIVI F on coinage. The god-like imagery that was created for the cult image of *Divus Iulius* contrasted to Augustus' refusal to allow his own statue to be placed inside the Forum Augustum or in Agrippa's new Pantheon, where it was instead paired with a statue of Agrippa on the porch. Furthermore, his achievement of permanent tribunician *sacrosanctitas* in 36 BCE gave Augustus unparalleled religious authority. He followed the model of Hellenistic monarchs with the adoption of a number of soteriological attributes, and with his assimilation to divinities and heroes, especially Apollo. Alexander the Great provided an important precedent for the divinity of the ruler. As seen in the Republican general from Tivoli, the imagery of Alexander had figured prominently in the ideology of Hellenistic and Roman leadership, but recalling Alexander could be problematic, since he was not only a heroic commander, but also a flawed one. The togate statue therefore became the preferred type for representing the emperor, revealing him to be *civilis princeps*, and (as on the Ara Pacis) sometimes portrayed *capite velato* to indicate the fulfillment of his religious duties. This persona was well suited to Augustus' self-image as first among equals, an important component of his dealing with the Senate. After the commanding representations of late Republican generals, the official imagery of Augustus can appear modest and almost self-effacing, but it offered a new model of a charismatic leader—one who not only achieved military triumph, but ensured the fruits of peace through his victory. And finally, although the changing of his name to Augustus was unprecedented, it cast him as *deus praesens*, a theme also echoed in contemporary poetry (e.g., Horace, *Carmen* 3.5).

Augustus was not actually deified until after his death. He did not permit the official worship of his mortal being in Rome and generally elsewhere in Italy (Cassius Dio 51.20.8), where he preferred to celebrate the memory of his adoptive father. Private individuals, however, might

act differently. During Augustus' lifetime a group of Roman businessmen in a town in North Africa worshipped the leader of the state as *Augustus Deus*, and a certain P. Perelius Hedulus built a private temple to the *Gens Augusta* (imperial family). Foreign and Italian municipalities might also institute worship of the *princeps*, but he only permitted shrines to be set up to himself by non-citizens and only when his person was specifically associated with the goddess Roma. In the western provinces, for example, a coin from Lugdunum mint with the representation of an altar and the legend ROM ET AUG (ca. 10 CE) indicates that a cult of Roma and Augustus had been established at the site where 60 Gallic tribes met as a provincial league. As Zanker (1988, 199) observed, the content of coinage betrays a marked independence from the emperor on the part of its various producers. Throughout the east Octavian resisted being described as a *theos*, and the fact that just two of the seven eastern Greek provinces had cults of Augustus stresses the emperor's reluctance to be worshipped. A coin of 19/18 BCE issued at Pergamon shows on the reverse a temple dedicated to Roma and Augustus by the League of Asian cities (legend COM ASIAE); a priesthood and games were also established at Pergamon. In Carthage an altar was dedicated to the *Gens Augusta*, and Augustus was worshipped as *Genius Coloniae*. The evolving worship of Augustus in the provinces augmented his divine aura in Rome.

Imperial Imagery under the Julio-Claudians

Augustus' reticence to embrace divine imagery in Rome makes the iconographical interpretation of a cuirass statue found at the villa of Livia *ad Gallinas Albas*, close to a late imperial gate called Prima Porta, especially problematic (Kähler 1959; Kleiner 1992, 63–67). Classicizing in style, it represents Augustus in his role as *imperator* ([Figure 10.7](#)). The shape of the head, its hair, and idealized features are comparable to those of the fifth-century BCE *Doryphoros* by Polykleitos, and although Augustus' distinct physiognomy shows through, the distant and tranquil expression of his face is also idealized. Most markedly, the contrapposto of the pose replicates the *Doryphoros* (Pollini 1995). Augustus, however, carries a consular baton rather than a spear in his left hand and raises his right to address his troops, echoing the *adlocutio* gesture displayed by the *Arringatore* and thereby transforming the self-contained Greek image into a Roman one. Whereas the cuirass at the feet of the Tivoli commander was unadorned, that worn by Augustus is covered with figures that promote a political agenda. Hellenistic artists had developed the bas-reliefs on a cuirass as a field for ornament; Roman sculptors exploited them for complex political allegories.

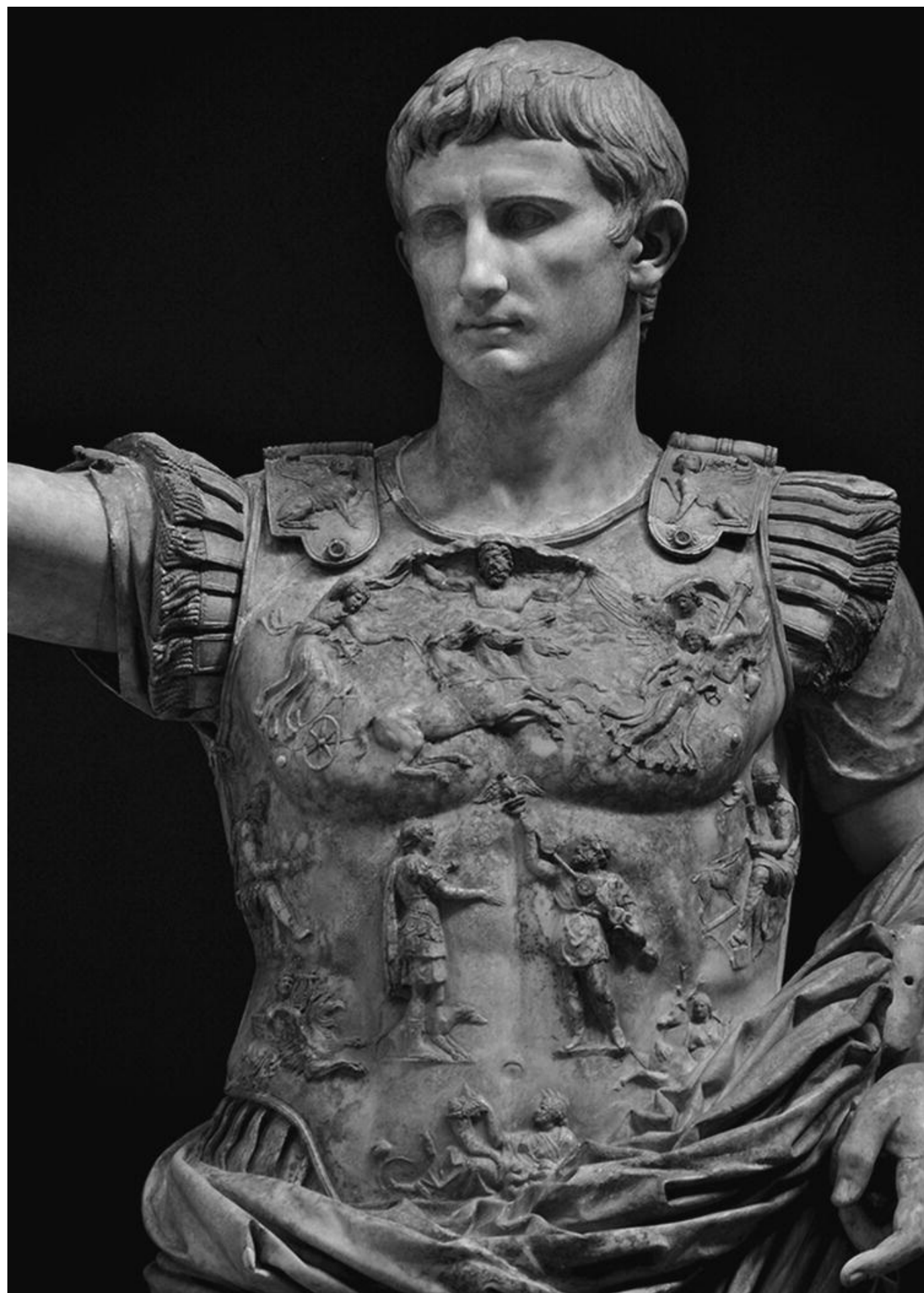


Figure 10.7 Augustus of Prima Porta, Copy of c. 15 CE after an original of c. 20 BCE (H 2.04 m). Rome, Vatican Museum, Braccio Nuovo n. 14.

Photo: Courtesy John Pollini.

Here, a series of zones displays diverse Roman deities, personifications, and historical figures. At the apex rises Caelus, and just below are the sun god Sol in his quadriga and Aurora riding on the back of a female personification. In the central register the figures may represent a seated Hispania on the left and another captive female barbarian, possibly Gallia, at the right. Beneath these ride Apollo with his lyre on a winged griffin and Diana on a stag, the same pair that once adorned the now lost Arch of Gaius Octavius on the Palatine; reclining at the base is a classicizing Tellus-Italia cradling two infants, evocative of the Ara Pacis. The appearance of such imagery here demonstrates further how monumental official programs and smaller commissions employed a shared rhetoric, as also revealed on the Belvedere Altar. These peripheral figures frame the breastplate's two central persons and elevate their action to a cosmic realm. The tunic and baggy pants identify the figure on the right as a Parthian barbarian. He presents a Roman standard to the man on the left who wears a helmet, a cuirass, and military boots, accompanied by an animal identified as either a dog or a she-wolf. His identification is controversial, including Augustus-Aeneas, Tiberius, Mars, Romulus, and the personification of the Roman army. Most scholars agree that the scene portrays the return to Rome in 20 BCE of the military standards captured from the Roman general Crassus by the Parthians in 53 BCE. Diplomatic negotiation rather than military success lay behind this achievement, but Augustus made much of the Parthian settlement: it represented his first significant victory since Actium, which had actually been part of a civil war. Fashioning this event as a more traditional triumph over foreign adversaries would provide an unassailable basis for Augustan authority.

Yet Augustus is portrayed barefooted, which previously was only allowed on images of gods and heroes. Buttressing the statue is a small Cupid, son of Venus, riding a dolphin, an attribute of his mother; both may refer to Julian claims of descent from Venus, a way of asserting divine lineage without claiming full divine status. Here, barefootedness and the divine references may indicate that the statue is a posthumous copy of an original of about 20 BCE set up in some public place. Livia may have set up this version at her villa, or it may possibly have been a gift from her son Tiberius after Augustus' death, perhaps to honor the woman who had campaigned so long for his succession. (Owing to the deaths of Gaius and Lucius Caesar, Augustus formally adopted Tiberius in 4 CE, coercing Tiberius into adopting the emperor's nephew Germanicus at the same time.) According to Suetonius (*Tiberius* 9.1), Tiberius served as Augustus' intermediary for the transfer of the standards, the primary scene on the armor, possibly his greatest service to his adoptive father. The depiction of Tiberius receiving the Roman standards from a Parthian barbarian could represent an elaboration of the original version, possibly alluding to his legitimacy as the successor to the new god Augustus, as Augustus had previously associated himself with Julius Caesar. It certainly demonstrates the growing Roman preference for the depiction of historical events amid environments peopled by gods and personifications, elements that were relegated to distinct reliefs on different walls on the Ara

Pacis. This expansion of Augustan visual rhetoric—for private commissions if not for public reliefs and statue groups—might therefore date the statue to the first years of Tiberius’ reign (r. 14–37 CE).

In the east, the deified *princeps* might be represented in a number of ways, including the use of divine symbols and attributes, teamed with divinities as *comites*, or even depicting him in a god-like fashion. According to Josephus (*The Wars of the Jews* 1.414; *Antiquities of the Jews* 15.339, 16.136), in 9 BCE Augustus was portrayed like Pheidias’ Olympian Zeus in Herod the Great’s Temple of Roma and Augustus at Caesarea. As with the Prima Porta statue, the complex imagery of the divinized Augustus on a cameo known as the Gemma Augustea challenges iconographic interpretation ([Figure 10.8](#)). Cameos were small, and thus designed for private display and intimate viewing. They were first produced in the Hellenistic era, but continued in popularity with Romans for depicting highly structured group scenes with historical and political—especially dynastic—references. Augustus’ favorite gem cutter, Dioscurides, or one of his disciples may have incised this finely detailed sardonyx circa 10–20 CE; some scholars, however, prefer an early Tiberian chronology, while others date it to the Claudian revival of Augustan imagery that characterizes the piece (Kähler 1968; Scherrer 1988; Pollini 1993; cf. Lapatin, [Chapter 17](#), this volume).



Figure 10.8 Gemma Augustea, c. 15 CE (H 19 cm × W 23 cm). Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, inv. IXa AS 79.

Photo: Andreas Praefcke/Wikimedia Commons.

The figures are arranged in two registers. In the upper tier divinities and personifications surround three human protagonists whose features conform to those of specific members of the imperial circle: Augustus, Tiberius, and Germanicus. Augustus sits on a double throne (*bisellium*) toward the center of the scene; he is nude from the waist up, his lower body draped in a mantle, his sandaled feet resting on a shield. At his side is an eagle, both an attribute of Jupiter and now a symbol of imperial power, and he holds the augur's staff (*lituus*) in his right hand and the scepter of Jupiter in his left. He shares the *bisellium* with Roma (whom some argue strongly resembles Livia). Her arms—a spear in her right hand, a helmet, and a sheathed sword strapped across her chest—indicate her wary vigilance. Her foot rests on the same shield as the emperor's, which could allude to either the newly conquered barbarians or the

Julian descent from Mars through Romulus. A Capricorn, the birth sign claimed by Augustus, hovers between Roma and Augustus. At the left a togate and wreathed Tiberius alights from a chariot driven by Victoria, who impatiently urges him to continue to fight new battles. A young Germanicus, depicted in a cuirass, also turns toward the emperor and further links Augustus with his successor. At the right Tellus-Italia leans against the *bisellium*; her cornucopia and two babies underscore again the message of fecundity under the *Pax Romana*. Behind Augustus, Oikoumene personifies the civilized world of the Empire and complements the personifications of Rome and Italy. She crowns the enthroned Augustus with the oak leaf *corona civica*, traditionally used to honor someone for saving the life of a Roman citizen, here given to Augustus because he saved the entire nation from civil bloodshed. Between Oikoumene and Tellus-Italia stands a partially nude Oceanus or Neptune, representing the realm of water and balancing the composition across from Victoria and Tiberius at the far left. The upper register thus celebrates Augustus' peaceful dominion over the civilized world, both land and sea.

In the lower tier the figures are less readily identifiable, and their iconographic interpretation remains contested. The upper and lower scenes occur at different times in a representation of cause and effect. The lower scene occurs at the northern frontiers, where four figures erect a trophy to celebrate their recent victory, preceding the triumph on the upper register. Romans did not restrict historical scenes to monumental state reliefs, and the presence of three portraits here suggests that the cameo alludes to one or more specific historical events, the precise identification of which is unresolved. Since a Scorpio decorates the shield attached to the *tropaion*, it might refer to Tiberius' successful Illyrian campaign, but if the German captives to the right allude to the German conflict, the two lower scenes would have to be seen separately. Suggestions include the triumph of Tiberius in 7 BCE, after his German victories; Tiberius' triumph in 12 CE after his victories in Illyricum; and the ceremonial return from war (*adventus*) of Tiberius in 9 CE after the Illyrian victories. In the last case, it has also been pointed out that Germanicus was the one who announced Tiberius' Illyrian conquest in Rome (Cassius Dio 56.16.4), which would explain his inclusion in the scene. The lower edge of a toga is all that remains of a missing figure to the left of Tiberius (the left side of the cameo was recut in post-antique times, perhaps in order that the gem fit its new gold setting). The figure has been variously identified as the Genius Senatus, Tiberius' son Drusus the Younger, and Venus, among others. In support of Drusus, it has been asserted that he was accorded honors at the time of his father's Illyrian victory, even though he did not participate in the campaigns and even though Drusus, in toga, and Germanicus, in battle dress, were Tiberius' son and adopted son, respectively. Their inclusion would thus make reference to the (perhaps optimistic) *concordia* of the imperial family and reinforce their dynastic ambitions, similar to the dynastic claims made publicly in the Ara Pacis and other state monuments.

Augustus's *lituus* signifies that he guarantees the *pax deorum* by mediating between the human and divine realms and also makes reference to his patron god, Apollo, whose oracles revealed divine will. The introduction of Jupiter's attributes, like the long scepter and the eagle, blatantly contradicts the first-among-equals image that Augustus had cultivated in his public monuments at Rome. However, as noted, like all cameos the Gemma Augustea was a private

object, inviting experimentation with imagery that might prove unacceptable for public dissemination. In the private realm, the emperor could adopt any guise he wanted, including divinity. If the cameo were made during his lifetime, it would have been commissioned by Augustus or a member of his circle as a gift for another member of that circle or as a presentation piece for a foreign dignitary (perhaps from a province where the worship of the emperor was permitted). Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that he would have commissioned a work so celebratory of Tiberius, whose military victories are represented as the foundation of the Augustan peace. Therefore, it seems more likely that the cameo, like the Prima Porta statue, was commissioned after Augustus' death, by Livia, or even by Tiberius himself.

Tiberius' policies were based closely on those of his immediate predecessor. In the first years of his principate he commissioned monuments that closely associated him with the *Divus Augustus*, emphasizing those military and diplomatic achievements in which he had been instrumental. This set a pattern that was followed by his successors, who also sought political advantage through artistic commissions whose imagery associated them with distinguished predecessors. For example, in 43 Claudius completed and dedicated the Ara Pietatis Augustae, originally vowed by Tiberius in 22 (Cordischi 1985). Its surviving reliefs represent sacrifices conducted before temples identifiable as built by Augustus. In a single monument, Claudius is thereby able to establish for the Roman public his dynastic connections with both Tiberius (rather than his immediate predecessor, the discredited Caligula) and Augustus. However, as already demonstrated, not all public monuments were commissioned by the state. Throughout the Empire, altars, honorific statues, and other types celebrated the state, but their patrons were not necessarily its official representatives. Thus, sometime between 59 and 67 a group of citizens in Mogontiacum (modern Mainz) commissioned two local sculptors to design an immense column topped with a statue of Jupiter *pro salute Neronis* ([Figure 10.9](#)). Republican leaders had erected similar monuments, but here for the first time artists covered the base and shaft with sculpted reliefs, its figured imagery of personifications and divinities indicating that they were familiar with stylistic and iconographic developments current in Rome itself (Bauchhenss and Noelke 1981; Kleiner 1992, 157–158). Not only does the monument provide a precedent for the historiated columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius in Rome and for numerous columns and piers dedicated to Jupiter Optimus Maximus in Germany, it also establishes that the monumental celebration of the state in the provinces was not exclusively generated from—or imposed by—the capital.



Figure 10.9 Jupiter Column, 59–67 CE (H c. 9 m). Mainz.

Photo: Courtesy Kimberly Cassibry.

Continuity and Legacy

In the late 1930s, two marble relief panels were discovered beneath the Palazzo della Cancelleria in Rome and named for their findspot ([Figure 10.10](#)). They depict events from the life of Domitian and the history of the Flavian dynasty, founded by Domitian's father Vespasian in 69 CE, and were undoubtedly conceived in an effort to legitimize that family's rule (Magi 1945; Koeppel 1969). Although other Flavian reliefs, such as those decorating the Arch of Titus, experimented with a novel (so-called baroque) style, the Cancelleria Reliefs echo Augustan classicism.



Figure 10.10 Cancelleria Relief, top: Frieze B: *Adventus of Vespasian*; bottom: Frieze A: *Profectio of Domitian*, 83–95 CE (H 2.06 m); Rome, Vatican Museums, Museo Gregoriano Profano.

Photo: Courtesy John Pollini.

Frieze A has generated debate over whether it represents a ceremonial departure for (*profectio*) or *adventus* from war, and whether the campaigns took place in the 80s or 90s. The emperor's divine patroness Minerva pulls him forward to join the war god Mars, who leads at the left, while Roma grasps the emperor's elbow to help propel him forward. At the right soldiers advance to join him, all saluted by the *genii* of the Roman Senate and the Roman people. Ancient writers such as Suetonius (*Domitian* 6) allege that Domitian's military endeavors were motivated by a quest for personal glory rather than necessity and were largely unpopular, but this image would appear to argue against such accusations by depicting Domitian as a reluctant commander, not yet armed for war. Following his assassination in 96, the Senate passed *damnatio memoriae* on Domitian, his statues and arches were destroyed and his name erased from all public records. Some of his statues were recarved to portray the new emperor Nerva. Here the emperor's head is markedly out of proportion to his body, the eyes differently scaled and the neck too long, clearly proving that this representation of Nerva was recarved out of an earlier depiction of Domitian.

Frieze B depicted another, earlier event from the Flavian period. After Nero's death in 68, four powerful generals—Galba, Otho, Vitellius, and Vespasian—fought for control of the Empire. Following the quick demise of Galba and Otho, only Vespasian and Vitellius remained. At the time Vespasian was undertaking the siege of Jerusalem in Judaea. Rather than returning to Rome, he had his trusted ally Mucianus invade Rome in December, quickly routing the forces of Vitellius. Vespasian established an interim administration with Domitian as his representative and Mucianus as acting emperor. According to both Tacitus and Suetonius, Domitian's conduct during this period was so wanting that Vespasian hastened to Rome in late September of 70 to restrain his son, the event believed to be depicted in this frieze. (The literary evidence must be regarded warily, however, as Tacitus has been shown to have been profoundly biased against Domitian.) The young man in a toga at the far left, traditionally identified as Domitian, appears to assure his father Vespasian, shown toward the right, that he has fulfilled his role honorably and has helped govern Rome effectively in his absence. This would suggest that the Cancelleria reliefs were intended to counter widespread rumors regarding the future emperor's conduct. However, it has been argued that the head of Vespasian in Frieze B has also been reworked, probably also under Nerva. Why would the new emperor want to represent a predecessor rather than himself? It has also been argued that the original head depicted Domitian and that the youthful togatus instead represents somebody else, perhaps a priest. Nerva's decision to transform the head of Domitian into that of the worthy Vespasian would then represent an attempt to associate the new emperor with the founder of the Flavian dynasty rather than his immediate predecessor, just as in his commissions Claudius had allied himself to Augustus and Tiberius rather than to Caligula (Bergmann 1981; Ritter 1982).

Depending on the campaign depicted in Frieze A, the reliefs were originally carved after 83 (the wars against the Chatti) and before 95 (the Sarmatian War), most likely to adorn one of the numerous buildings erected under Domitian, such as the *Templum Divorum*, a shrine dedicated to the military triumphs of Vespasian and Titus, or one of his destroyed arches. As with the *Gemma Augustea's* casting of a diplomatic coup as a military victory, these very public reliefs

are also at variance with the written record. And although the prominent mingling of historical personages with divine *comites* appeared previously on public monuments, here it was considered prudent to include personifications of the older embodiments of state authority, the Senate and Roman people, perhaps in an attempt to assuage Roman sensibilities in a turbulent period. The decision to adapt such fine reliefs to a new context underscores the vital political importance of an imperially sponsored state monument. Nor is this a unique case of recasting *spolia*: in the fourth century, the triple-bay Arch of Constantine incorporated architectural elements and state relief sculpture dating from the reigns of Trajan, Hadrian, and Marcus Aurelius. New inscriptions were added and on eight relief panels from a lost Arch of Marcus Aurelius, the heads of Marcus were replaced with those of Constantine, in modern times replaced again with heads of Trajan (Ryberg 1967). Viewers would not have been troubled by the combination on one monument featuring incongruous styles, for, as demonstrated by the base of Marcus Antonius, Roman art had been eclectic from its beginnings.

The Study of Antiquity Today

Whatever the ancient Roman view, today we regard the monuments discussed in this chapter as artworks (cf. Kampen 1995), which, like literature, demand the active participation of viewers to engage them in creative dialogue. Their visual rhetoric invites viewers, ancient and modern, to read narratives that might complement or contradict those found in literary sources, but with a physical immediacy that no text can rival. The methodologies of art history have generated conflicting explanations for such basic problems as iconographic details of who and what are depicted, dating, and style; new archaeological finds continue to challenge traditional interpretations. Although we may never fully resolve these issues, we will certainly refine our analyses. What is not contested is that Romans commissioned these monuments to articulate evolving ideologies and negotiate shifting power relationships; such commissions displayed a patron's conception of the state and helped establish his position in it.

Also typical of a modern approach is the tendency of scholars to characterize these monuments as propaganda, an unfortunate term due to its anachronism and its connotations of top-down, purposeful deception promoted by some central agency. The case studies here have demonstrated that patrons actually came from across the social spectrum throughout the Empire. Their commissions represented merely one component of a larger rhetorical practice developed to persuade other Romans within the context of a broadly shared ideological vocabulary. In the Republic, commissions established that the patron's service to the state deserved remembrance; in the Empire, official monuments might also associate a regime with venerated predecessors, advance an emperor's dynastic claims or profession of divinity, or justify unpopular policies. Small luxury objects, meant only for viewing by a limited, private audience, permitted patrons to try novel imagery with a significance conceivably inappropriate for public consumption. And non-elites also staked their claim in the evolving state by commissioning neighborhood altars and other modest works. Thus, no single faction defined the state for all Romans.

The imagery of these diverse monuments—figured with personifications, divinities, and

portraits—represented allegories and historical events that conveyed the kinds of activities that Romans considered worthy of commemoration, especially military achievement, civic accomplishment, and religious devotion. They provide evidence for innovations in artistic style, which itself could become a vehicle of meaning that implied connections (or contrasts) for sophisticated viewers. Undoubtedly, the finer details of their visual rhetoric were sometimes misunderstood by those who could not read its language and references, but all viewers could comprehend the messages of grand (or precious) scale, costly material, and impressive workmanship. Patronage remains central to our understanding of the social and political context of their creation. Our challenge is to harness analytical approaches to help reconstruct Roman commemorative strategies and thereby recognize the significance of these monuments. For modern viewers, understanding how meaning was communicated can be as rewarding as determining the specific details of what was conveyed.

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

This synopsis of some of the most studied Roman monuments barely touches on certain issues while leaving others entirely unaddressed. Brilliant (1963), Hannestad (1986), Kleiner (1992), and Zanker (2010) contextualize them in different ways within comprehensive and copiously illustrated narratives; Hölscher ([Chapter 2](#), this volume) discusses methodological issues around “historical” representations; among specific studies, I balance standard works with subsequent ones proposing alternative interpretations. Whereas most scholars emphasize the Roman appropriation of Greek artistic conventions during the Republic, Felletti Maj (1977) parses out specifically Italic practice; I previously examined the development during that period of historical commemorative practices (Holliday 2002). In fact, the Roman appropriation of Greek visual culture is undergoing a major reassessment; one recent contribution to this discourse is Perry (2005). Three important works that focus on the Augustan period are Simon (1986), Hofter (1988), and Raaflaub and Toher (1990). Koortbojian (2014) discusses visual representations related to the divinization of Caesar and Augustus. Also instructive is Elsner (1996). Stewart (2005) explores different ways in which artists and patrons contributed to Roman cultural patterns, while Petersen (2006) provides an antidote to the usual emphasis on elites. Bartman (1999) and Kampen (2009 and [Chapter 4](#), this volume) open up patronage to gender issues. Varner (2004) examines the purposeful destruction and recutting of monuments. Finally, I benefited immensely from reading the manuscript for Pollini (2012), which probes the distinctions between public and private commissions and the rise of the imperial cult.

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CHAPTER 11

“Arte Plebea” and Non-elite Roman Art

Lauren Hackworth Petersen

Assessments of style and the formation of stylistic categories are staples of art-historical research. As a method of critical inquiry, an analysis of style can be useful in defining a set of visual criteria that at once distinguishes some works of art from others, while grouping together those that share a definable pattern. For example, as historians of Roman art, we discuss wall decoration and painting styles (the First, Second, Third, and Fourth Styles) and what the characteristics and dates are for each (e.g., Mau 1882; cf. Ling 1991; Leach 2004; Strocka 2007), or define a historical style and interpret its meanings (such as Flavian art, which is distinguished from Julio-Claudian art in appearance and message). Analyses of style thus create relationships among works of art primarily derived from drawing comparisons and contrasts based on visual characteristics. In fact, categories of style can be immensely useful, as they help to organize bodies of artistic material and to create historical narratives (Ackerman 1962). All of this may seem obvious and something that we may take for granted, but there is much at stake in defining categories of style—often with some problematic consequences. Such is the case with the study of Roman art.

This chapter takes as a point of departure Jaś Elsner’s observation that style was once “king” of the discipline of art history. He asserts that it should be central to what we do as art historians, despite the fact that style as a method of art-historical inquiry apparently died in the 1970s and 1980s (Elsner 2003, 98). In Roman art, however, investigations into style never really faded away. Rather, it could be argued that we put style to a different use than scholars did earlier in the twentieth century—that is, in the name of a social history of Roman art that produced the category of non-elite art.

Style and Roman Art

To begin, we are confronted with the fact that the corpus of Roman art resists easy categorization; it defies the type of internal, chronological/stylistic development that has traditionally been assigned to Greek art: archaic, severe, classical, late classical, and Hellenistic period styles (cf. Donohue 2005 for a rigorous challenge of this type of “objective” description). It has thus been commonplace to think about Roman art as wide-ranging and diverse, with eclecticism being its defining attribute: eclecticism is what makes Roman art Roman (Bianchi Bandinelli 1970; Brendel 1979; Kleiner 1992, 9–11). Indeed, at a given time or on a single Roman monument, we can sometimes detect the presence of more than one style. The column base of Antoninus Pius (161 CE) serves as an excellent and oft-cited example ([Figures 11.1–11.2](#)). Of its four sides, one contains an inscription, one a scene of apotheosis, and the other two are identical and show the funerary *decursio*, military maneuvers in honor of the deceased (Vogel 1973; Kleiner 1992, 285–288; Davies 2004, 40–42, 96–101). The

apotheosis scene owes much of its appearance to the classical tradition in ancient art. The figures are carved against a plain background and with a single ground line, which serves to provide a steadying frame with which we view the image head on. The bodies themselves are rendered in what we tend to consider as pleasing, naturalistic proportions. With the strong use of vertical and horizontal lines (except for the winged *genius*/Aion), the composition is calm. The faces likewise carry solemn, almost aloof expressions. In contrast, the identical reliefs depicting the *decursio* are often described as being non-classical or as simply different from the apotheosis relief (Kleiner 1992, 285). While the figures are carved against a plain background, they are pitched in high relief, creating deep pockets of shadow. The scene is depicted with two simultaneous viewpoints—the men in the central portion are seen head on, and those on horseback are seen uneasily in a tilted perspective. Yet the latter group occupies several horizontally placed turf segments, forcing viewers to read the cavalymen both head on and as if from above. The horses and bodies are put into motion with the use of diagonal lines. One could also point out that the men appear disproportionately large for the horses and are of relatively solid or sturdy proportions.

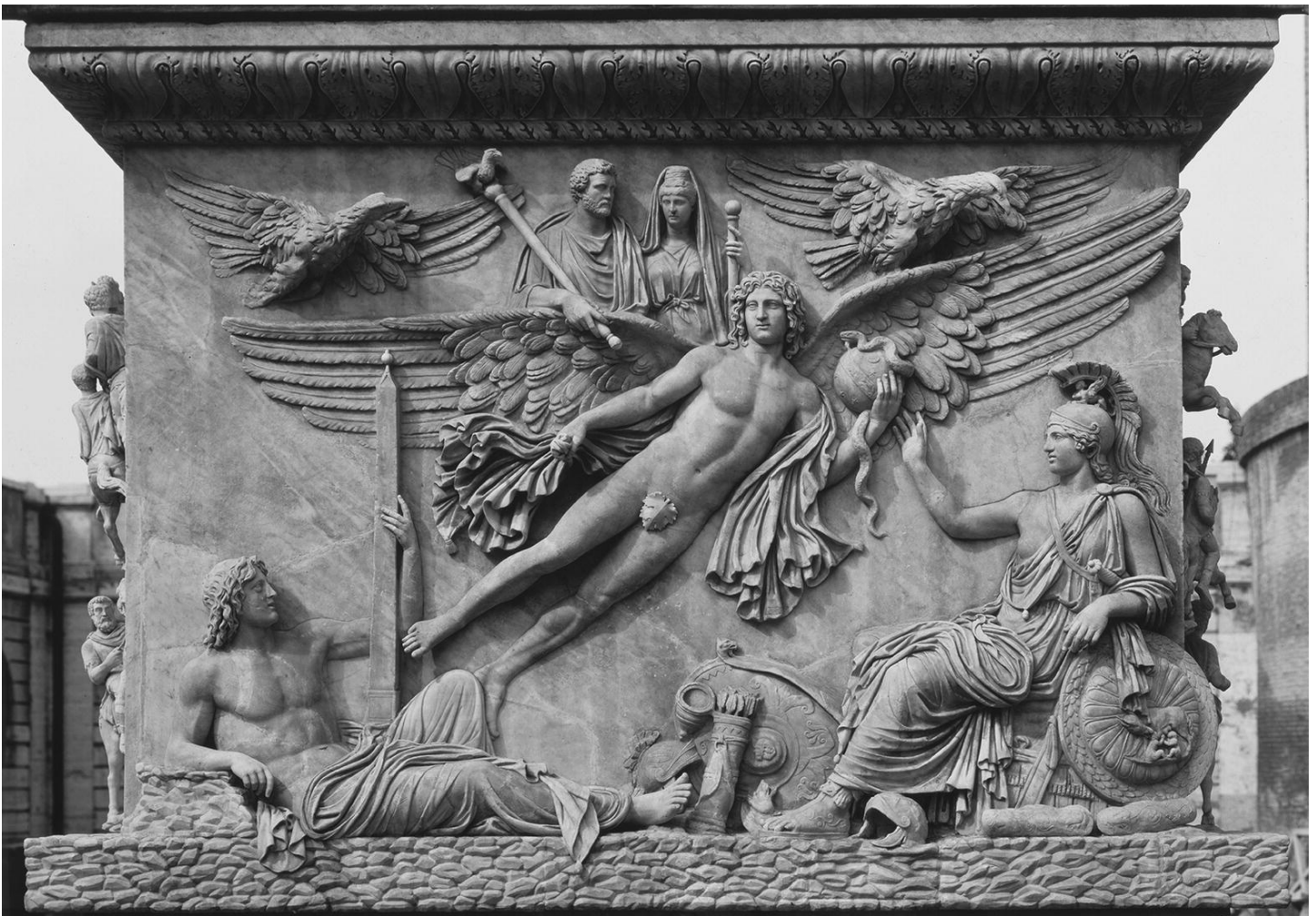


Figure 11.1 Apotheosis of Antoninus Pius and Faustina, from the base of the Column of Antoninus Pius, 161 CE. Rome, Vatican Museums, Cortile delle Corazze.

Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY – ART45685.



Figure 11.2 Parade of soldiers, from the base of the Column of Antoninus Pius, 161 CE. Rome, Vatican Museums, Cortile delle Corazze.

Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY – ART 22011.

How we describe objects reveals our values and priorities. To describe the *decursio* reliefs as unclassical reifies a bias toward more classically rendered artistic forms, which is to say that the *decursio* reliefs are typically put up against the normalized standard as depicted on the apotheosis relief, whether explicitly or implicitly. Despite many recent and outstanding attempts to question the primacy of classically rendered images (namely, imperial images), dualisms are alive and strong in the study of Roman art. This essay briefly summarizes some of the assumptions that seem to lie behind these dualisms, with an eye toward understanding the circumstances leading to Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli's influential theory of the plebeian tradition (*arte plebea*) in Roman art and its aftermath. It concludes with some recent contextual and social approaches that attempt to integrate the seemingly unwieldy corpus of Roman art objects into the canon, while pointing to some strategies that we might consider in describing Roman art and in narrating its multipronged histories (cf. Kampen 1995 and 2003).

A History of Roman Art History

Most surveys of Roman art tend to present a narrative that is biased toward the capital city of Rome, thereby privileging monuments produced by and for the emperors and the imperial retinue (there are exceptions, to be sure: e.g., D'Ambra 1998; Elsner 1998b; to some extent Kleiner 2010; Knapp 2011). Indeed, the city of Rome was a city defined by its emperors (Hope 2000). It is no coincidence that if surveys of Roman art focus on the capital city, they will thus necessarily construct a history that follows the lives of the emperors, thereby “erasing” from history what does survive of those individuals of ordinary means in Rome; namely, the large numbers of tombs and their artifacts. Beyond these funerary monuments, however, Rome preserves precious little of the non-elite inhabitants of the city. For this material, one needs to look outside Rome, to urban centers and communities within Italy and beyond. This evidence can be overwhelmingly voluminous, nevertheless. The territories of the Roman empire were vast and complex, but fixedly on the margins of the capital city and thus in scholarly thought—until recently. Moreover, the somewhat pejorative terms that historians invoke to explore the patronage of art produced by and for those outside elite circles—non-elite, sub-elite, plebeian, subaltern, and so on—reveal a clear bias toward the elite. These artistic commissions tend to be defined monolithically by what they are not (i.e., *non-elite*), in part because their histories do not readily fit into the narrative constructed for Roman art, which emphasizes the artistic patronage of and for the emperors.

All of these biases aside, what the early imperial dynasties produced was an artistic vocabulary that largely looked to the Hellenic world for its inspiration, and scholars have long recognized the rich legacy that the Romans inherited from the Greeks (e.g., Beard and Henderson 2001; Gazda 2002; Marvin 2008). For example, Augustus' Ara Pacis (9 BC; [Figures 10.4–10.5](#)) is often referred to as reviving fifth-century BCE ideals of classicism, whereas the interior relief panels of the Arch of Titus (81 CE) looked more to Hellenistic models, with their dramatically deep carving and depiction of lively movement. However, as we know, not all Roman art imperial forms took their cues from the Greek visual tradition, such as the previously mentioned *decursio* reliefs of the column base of Antoninus Pius. Recognizing that artistic production of the later imperial period (post 150 CE) looks different from its early imperial counterparts, art historians of the first half of the twentieth century sought to explain the motivations behind and the sources of the fundamental stylistic change—what is called the *Stilwandel*—citing it as a late antique style that was deliberately unclassical (and non-Hellenic), with its rigid frontality and comparatively unnaturalistic figural proportions. (It was a style that scholars would eventually link to non-elite artistic production; see Brendel 1979 and Clarke 2003, 2–3, for a historiography of attitudes to Roman art.) Implicit in discussions of the *Stilwandel* is the scholarly desire to locate Roman art within theories of stylistic development that could be mapped out in a way somewhat analogous to the perceived trajectory of Greek art, which was accepted as the norm, thus permitting Roman art to “fit” into larger art-historical narratives.

As late as the mid-twentieth century, Bernard Berenson's (in)famous attack on the Arch of Constantine (315 CE) reveals that biases that favored Greek-inspired form persisted in no uncertain terms; he could find no justification for the seemingly barbarous departure from Greek models in the art of Constantine. He refers to the Constantinian figures in the arch's

friezes as grossly ill proportioned, stumpy, and “gelatinous,” and the arch itself as unoriginal ([Figure 7.2](#); Berenson 1954, 28; on which see Elsner 1998a). Moreover, Berenson posits that this “decline of form” heralded a dark age in artistic production (the beginning of the Middle Ages). Although written some decades ago, and seeming a bit old-fashioned now, Berenson has had a more recent impact. Nigel Spivey, in a 1995 article, sides with him, noting that the figures’ lack of classically rendered proportions—that is, their “stumpiness”—is “demonstrative of a native ‘plebeian’ style” (Spivey 1995, 22). Spivey views this unclassical style as not so much a herald of a decline of form, but as one that had been long in existence, albeit not the preferable style; it belonged to those who seemed incapable of commissioning anything of higher aesthetic value. Spivey appears to be following in the footsteps of Gerhart Rodenwaldt, who, already in 1939, identified these dual aspects in Roman art by putting “great” state art up against “popular art,” the latter of which he describes as containing “something of the untamed quality but also the strength of the barbarian. One might almost call it a provincial art within Rome itself” (Rodenwaldt 1939, 547).

Arte Plebea in Roman Art

As we have already witnessed with the *decursio* reliefs, some of the visual traits that Berenson derides in the Arch of Constantine appear much earlier in the corpus of Roman art than he suggests. In fact, one could look to art of the late Republic and early Imperial period to find some of these non-classical formal characteristics that were already part of Rome’s visual culture. By taking a priori the dichotomy of Greek and non-classically rendered forms in Roman art, Bianchi Bandinelli was among the first to expound on the link between artistic production and social history. He attempted to explain the visual characteristics of Roman art as less dependent on theories of an inevitable stylistic development, but as tied explicitly to class concerns, especially in the media of relief sculpture and portraiture. Specifically, he identified two traditions in Roman art—the patrician and the plebeian traditions (Bianchi Bandinelli 1967; 1970, 51–105; 1971, esp. 23–38). The patrician tradition (*arte aulica*) is tied to the elites in the capital Rome and is indebted to Hellenic artistic traditions, whereas the plebeian tradition—*arte plebea*—emerges in municipalities throughout Italy and is characterized by non-naturalistic, or symbolic, proportions, frontal views of figures, an overall lack of pictorial perspective, and expressive qualities. The plebeian trend, he proposes, is tied to the artistic patronage of lower-level office holders, soldiers, freedmen, and colonists and belongs to the realm of historical narratives and relief (Bianchi Bandinelli 1967, 17). With this paradigm, Bianchi Bandinelli is able to demonstrate that many of the visual qualities that had been identified as part of the *Stilwandel* appear centuries before the later imperial period, which is to say that patrician (classical) art forms appear alongside plebeian (unclassical) art forms throughout the early and late history of the Roman Empire (a notion that roughly parallels Rodenwaldt’s but without the punitive judgments). Moreover, he seems to want to believe that one style is not necessarily of higher aesthetic value than the other; rather, each is determined primarily by class interests. Dualisms thus become entrenched in Bianchi Bandinelli’s theory—classical/unclassical and patrician/plebeian—although he does make an allowance for overlap and borrowings from each other (Bianchi Bandinelli 1970, 64).

This step is a tremendous one, albeit not without some problems. It brings to the fore the notion that two competing styles could coexist in Roman art (rather than one style developing internally into another). Moreover, it is indebted to Marxist theories of class struggle and, as such, Bianchi Bandinelli posits that the change in appearance of Roman art in the later imperial period (the *Stilwandel*) roughly coincides with the increasing political power of the plebs. By highlighting the centrality of artistic commissions of those outside elite circles and outside the city of Rome, Bianchi Bandinelli changes dramatically the narrative possibilities for the history of Roman art. Artistic forms become inextricably linked to class, with an outcome very different from Berenson's. Whereas Berenson held Greek art as the "natural" standard and thus saw a pitiful decline in form and in the quality of artistic production in the art of Constantine, Bianchi Bandinelli presumed an outcome with more positive connotations—the rise of the plebs and their "self-assertion" in artistic production, and the concomitant incorporation of their visual vocabulary into the art commissioned by the elites in the later imperial period. The visual language of the plebs, it would seem, could most expressively articulate Rome's dramatic social changes of the last centuries (Bianchi Bandinelli 1971, 23–38).

One limitation with Bianchi Bandinelli's theory, despite its attempt to overcome the traditional hierarchy of art forms, is that it is still rooted within the old paradigms of classical versus non-classical art; plebeian art is defined as not classically rendered. Furthermore, Bianchi Bandinelli's theory is by and large essentialist, pre-determined, and reductive. It suggests an unconditional linking of unclassically rendered forms with plebeian artistic commissions, as if art commissioned by plebeians was necessarily bound to this way of artistic representation. Of course, part of his theory stems from his own Marxist agenda, but, as a historian of Roman art and archaeology, he also inherits a literary tradition, one that neatly allows for his own political leanings—epitomized by Trimalchio, the classic up-from-under fictional character of antiquity. Trimalchio is an outrageously wealthy but boorish ex-slave, who features in one chapter of Petronius' famous mid-first-century novel, the *Satyricon* (on the following, Petersen 2006, 1–12; all translations of the *Satyricon* are taken from Arrowsmith 1987).

Arte Plebea and Trimalchio

Petronius' Trimalchio is a Roman freed slave, a plebeian to be sure. While not a historical figure, his character is likely of the general type that Romans encountered in life, if manifestly exaggerated. In the *Satyricon*, Trimalchio hosts a lavish dinner party with an army of slaves serving up extravagant dishes (26–79). In the course of his dinner party, Trimalchio explains that he came from Asia as a youth to his owner's house and was freed on his owner's death, at which time he inherited a tremendous fortune (*Satyricon*, 75–76). He also amassed wealth through various business dealings, the type of which the ultra-elite scorned, and became increasingly visible in Roman society (Petersen 2006, 17–18, 57–83, 114–117). Through his newly won citizen status and wealth, Trimalchio was able to rise from the most miserable of conditions to a life of relative luxury and comfort ("from mouse to millionaire," *Satyricon*, 77).

Notwithstanding the exaggeration present in the satire, Bianchi Bandinelli seems to view this

biographical trajectory as one that the plebs of Roman society could embrace and even celebrate in their monumental commissions. More specifically, he connects the plebeian style in art with Trimalchio's attitude and artistic commissions, such as his frescoes and his fictitious tomb commission (*Satyricon*, 29 [frescoes], 71 [tomb]). With Trimalchio at hand, Bianchi Bandinelli could justify many of his observations about Roman art produced by those outside elite circles. For example, in his discussion of the funerary monument of the former slave Lusius Storax in Teate (Chieti), he writes:

Clearly, this urge for self-assertion was particularly strong among ex-slaves. Once freed, by enfranchisement, from their wretched status, the freedmen (*liberti*) soon found openings in trade, and frequently amassed considerable fortunes. From here they could aspire to certain minor magistracies some of which (e.g. the *sevirate*) were purely honorific....

The *Satyricon* of Petronius, a picaresque novel probably composed in Nero's reign, strikingly illustrates the mentality behind these manifestations. One celebrated chapter introduces a wealthy freedman—and *sevir*—named Trimalchio ... [whose] instructions ... on how his tomb is to be built and decorated find their precise fulfillment in a number of funerary monuments from the *municipia*.

Perhaps the closest illustration of this passage from Trimalchio's Feast is to be found in the tomb of a *sevir* from Teate.

(Bianchi Bandinelli 1970, 60)

Bianchi Bandinelli continues by describing the styles of the reliefs of the tomb from Teate, otherwise known as the Tomb of Lusius Storax. As is typical of Roman art, the tomb reliefs are eclectic, coming from two artistic traditions, perhaps indicative of Storax's own rise from slavery to local prominence. Bianchi Bandinelli identifies the gladiatorial reliefs ([Figure 27.5](#), below) as of "sophisticated iconography" and "Hellenistic in origin," whereas he describes the image of Lusius Storax seated on a *dias* and surrounded by magistrates ([Figure 11.3](#)) as "completely Roman," by which he means belonging to the plebeian tradition (Bianchi Bandinelli 1970, 60).



Figure 11.3 Funerary monument of Lusius Storax, detail of reliefs, first century CE. Chieti, Museo Archeologico Nazionale.

Photo: Hutzel, Neg. D-DAI-Rom 1962.1069.

What Bianchi Bandinelli suggests in this passage and elsewhere is that the fictional character of Trimalchio and his artistic commissions were bound to his class interests, just as were those of the historical plebs. Put another way, Trimalchio provides Bianchi Bandinelli, among others, with a means to understanding some of the motives of individuals who left very little by way of historical documents, save their monuments—a scholarly approach that I have elsewhere called Trimalchio Vision (Petersen 2003, 238–240 and 2006, 6–10). Trimalchio Vision is problematic because it allows Trimalchio, a fictional figure of hyperbolic proportions, to represent historical reality, thereby tacitly permitting reductive comments about the artistic commissions of those outside elite circles; moreover, it can severely limit our appreciation of Rome’s complex past as told through the visual record. Telling is Bianchi Bandinelli’s assessment of the reliefs of Lusius Storax—sophistication is linked with the Hellenic tradition, and, by implication, its opposite with the plebeian trend. Perhaps unwittingly, Bianchi Bandinelli has reified the dualism that prioritizes Hellenic-looking art, despite his magisterial effort in bringing overdue attention to numerous and multifarious artistic commissions by Romans of moderate means and accomplishments.

It should be noted that one of the earliest opponents to Bianchi Bandinelli’s new paradigm was Bianca Maria Felletti Maj (1977). Instead of linking an artistic style to class interests, she posits that the unclassical style in Roman art belongs to an Italic tradition. In many respects, this notion is a welcome corrective to Bianchi Bandinelli’s theory, because it makes allowance for the so-called plebeian style appearing on different monument types, including imperial commissions. For example, while the interior reliefs of the Arch of Titus are indebted to a visual vocabulary of Hellenistic art, its exterior triumphal frieze is depicted in a style more

akin to what Bianchi Bandinelli saw in the artistic commissions of the plebs. While Felletti Maj's theory allows for some greater flexibility, it should be borne in mind that it, too, is reductive and essentializing, in part because it reinforces the dualism of Hellenic and native Italic (non-Hellenic).

Bianchi Bandinelli's identification of *arte plebea* focused almost exclusively on sculpted images—reliefs and portraits. This is not surprising given that much of the artistic legacy of the Roman world is crafted from stone and, perhaps more importantly, this medium permits us to connect artistic commissions with actual Romans. Many monuments that Bianchi Bandinelli considers come from the funerary or public/honorific realms, and, as such, most sculptures, whether portraits or relief, were accompanied with some type of inscription that reveals something about the individual(s) portrayed. For example, the altar of the four *vicomagistri* from a neighborhood (*vicus Aesculeti*) in Rome (2 CE) contains a relief depicting the four local, lower-level magistrates performing a sacrifice at an altar ([Figure 11.4](#); Lott 2004, 142–144, 199–200; cf. Clarke 2003, 81–85). Behind them stand a *tibia* (pipe) player and a lictor, the latter holding the fasces, while the bare-chested attendants and two sacrificial victims occupy the foreground. The inscriptions on two of the four sides of the monument provide us with the names of two of the magistrates, who happen to be former slaves. The bodies of the magistrates are rendered in proportions that approximate nature, although the arms and hands of each seem to receive special treatment, as if to draw attention to the act of sacrifice and hence the virtue of piety. What renders this commission as an example of *arte plebea*, besides the social standing of those who paid for the altar, are the proportions of the figures in the foreground in relation to the magistrates. Both the animals and *victimarii* (animal attendants) are of diminutive scale; their presence is largely symbolic. Their scale indicates their relative (un)importance compared to the local magistrates, while displaying the necessities of a sacrifice, and marking it as a public one, without encroaching on the space of the *vicomagistri*. With Bianchi Bandinelli's efforts to bring monuments, such as this altar, into the fold of Roman art history, scholars have since been able to reveal the significance of the artistic patronage of sub-elite individuals in civic, imperial, and religious contexts (esp. Clarke 2003; Lott 2004; D'Ambra and Métraux 2006; Mayer 2012).





Figure 11.4 Altar of the vicomagistri of the vicus Aesculeti, c. 2 CE. Rome, Capitoline Museum, Centrale Montemartini, inv. 855.

Photo: Koppermann, Neg. D-DAI-Rom 1960.1472.

Volkstümliche Kunst and Painting

Yet to be addressed is the enormous quantity of frescoes that the Roman world has left behind. For this material, historians move outside Rome and to the Bay of Naples. Coincidentally, this area preserves much of what we can glean about non-elite lives and art within the Italian peninsula from the late Republican and early Imperial periods. Relatively little of the direct imperial imprints that we witness in Rome survives in these municipalities. Instead, what is preserved in Campania is the flip-side of the grand imperial monuments that were allowed to remain in the capital city—namely, houses and workspaces (the dwellings of nearly all the

ancient inhabitants of Rome have long ago disappeared from the cityscape). When it comes to frescoes, however, it had been commonplace for historians to privilege those Roman walls with mythological paintings that have antecedents in Greek art, in terms of both subject and style. Put another way, these types of paintings fall into the general style designation of “high art,” which finds its sculpted parallels in Rome. Hence, surveys of Roman art tend to include this Campanian material by simply inserting it into the imperially driven narratives of Roman art.

This tendency is also one that modern scholarship, by and large, inherited from the early discovery of such paintings within communities around Mt. Vesuvius. When mythological paintings were found during excavations, they were cut from the walls and transported to Naples, where most continue to be on display in the National Archaeological Museum (e.g., Beard and Henderson 2001, 11–63). The walls from which the paintings came were allowed to remain in situ, along with paintings whose iconography and style did not belong in the stylistic category of “high art” (read Hellenic art). Indeed, until recently, the scholarly propensity has been to trace individual mythological paintings to lost Greek originals (e.g., von Blanckenhagen 1968; Bruno 1969; Lehmann 1979; Leach 1981). That has changed, of course, with the excellent work of John R. Clarke, Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, and Bettina Bergmann, for example, whose individual studies have been instrumental in shaping the current trends in scholarship; that is, of considering painting as part of wholly integrated wall, mosaic, and architectural ensembles (esp. Clarke 1991; Wallace-Hadrill 1994; Bergmann 1994, 1995, and 2002; cf. Trimble 2002).

In addition, much recent work has focused on how Roman domestic interiors helped to articulate the owner’s social identity, from the local elites to the working denizens of moderate means (most notably, Clarke 1991 and 2003, 223–268; Wallace-Hadrill 1994; Zanker 1998, 135–203; Hales 2003). In these studies, however, Trimalchio also looms large, especially in discussions of those houses whose ensembles seem to imitate (naively) those of lavish villas, which themselves took much of their inspiration from the Greek world. This is an easy target, as *domus* in an urban setting, such as at Pompeii, cannot compare to the extended villas in the countryside. Nonetheless, scholars tend to view Pompeian dwellings as (over)crowded with references to elite culture; the well-known House of the Vettii (VI.15.1) and House of Octavius Quartio (II.2.2) are the quintessential houses that scholars delight in deriding for what they are not, rather than for what they are (Clarke 1991, 193–235, and 2003, 98–105; Zanker 1998, 145–156 and 184–192). This tendency is persistent, making Pompeii seem as if it were inhabited by thousands and thousands of Trimalchios who did not understand the language of Roman interiors as they strove to articulate (or overstate) their standing in society. This paradigm of a trickle-down aesthetic (the opposite of what Bianchi Bandinelli had proposed with his theory of *arte plebea*) affirms the dualism of elite villa culture and non-elite domestic interiors, and the privileging of elite art. Recent challenges to this paradigm offer new approaches to how we talk about non-elites in the domestic sphere. For example, rather than isolating non-elite domestic interiors as distinct from elite villas, some scholars demonstrate how domestic ensembles—elite and non-elite alike—participated in a shared visual culture and its values (e.g., Dickmann 1999; Hales 2003; Petersen 2006, 123–183; Mayer 2012).

Among scholars working primarily with the genre of Roman painting (a medium largely overlooked by Bianchi Bandinelli), Thomas Fröhlich's study of the paintings of *lararia* (domestic shrines) and building façades perhaps provides the closest parallel to Bianchi Bandinelli's work (Fröhlich 1991). Fröhlich's work has become a standard source and deserves mention here, given its debt to Bianchi Bandinelli's. Although Fröhlich does not embrace Bianchi Bandinelli's Marxist agenda, he characterizes paintings within *lararia* or on street façades as *volkstümlich*, or "popular," especially those whose subject and style deviate from classical norms; meanwhile, those paintings that adhere to Hellenic ideals belong to the category of *Hochkunst* ("high art," which is analogous to Bianchi Bandinelli's *arte aulica*), of which there are only a few surviving examples. Despite the parallels that can be drawn between the dualisms *arte plebea/arte aulica* and *volkstümliche Kunst/Hochkunst*, Fröhlich resists linking the popular style in painting and its origins to a particular social group. Rather, he views this style as transcending social groups—from slaves to the elite—and thus functioning as an authentic expression of popular art (Fröhlich 1991, 189–210; for rebuttals, see Tybout 1996; Giacobello 2008). In addition, Fröhlich offers a rather mundane but plausible explanation for the typically unclassically rendered compositions of *lararia* and of paintings on street façades; namely, that they derive from the historical relief style so as to convey their messages as clearly as possible. Visibility and legibility were thus the primary aims of the "popular" style in painting.

This notion seems as though it should be especially true for façade paintings, most of which functioned as advertisements of sorts for the shops behind, according to Fröhlich, among others. The façade painting for the Shop of Verecundus at Pompeii (IX.7.7) provides an excellent and thought-provoking example ([Figure 11.5](#); cf. Fröhlich 1991, 333–335; Clarke 2003, 105–112; Potts 2009). Although depicted in paint, the façade painting is organized as if it were a relief. It is composed of two registers. The tallest register is reserved for the world of the gods: Venus Pompeiana in the center, mounted on a chariot driven by four elephants; Fortuna with her rudder and cornucopia at left; and at right a *Genius*, who holds a cornucopia in his left hand and a *patera* in his right. Hierarchy of scale places the gods (literally) above humans; and within the sphere of the gods, Venus, as the patron deity of Pompeii, reigns supreme. While all of the figures are depicted as if standing on a single-ground plane, the background is left relatively blank, with swags of garland framing the trio of gods. Below, of a more quotidian nature is the depiction of activities that presumably took place within Verecundus' workshop. At the center of the composition stand four nearly nude workers; they are making felt. Filling out the pictorial field are three wool combers, working as they sit at tables. At far right stands a man identified as Verecundus, the supposed proprietor of this enterprise, who displays a piece of cloth (this figure is labeled "Verecundus" under his feet). As with the deities above, the workers and Verecundus are depicted in strict frontality (there are no three-quarter views) and with an imageless background. Yet, the perspective of the tables extending from the furnace (in the center) is rendered with a bird's-eye view, perhaps to enhance visibility and identification of this apparatus as one used for making felt. While the figures themselves may be rendered in more or less classically inspired proportions and with highlights and shading to suggest volume, the compositions themselves retain qualities that Bianchi Bandinelli identified as belonging to the *arte plebea* trend, which tends to be grounded

in historical narrative.



Figure 11.5 Venus Pompeiana and clothworkers, from the shop of Verecundus, fresco, first century CE. Pompeii.

Photo: SAP-AFS 80887, su concessione del Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali – Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompei.

In this regard, it is typical for scholars to read this façade painting, and others like it, as a type of historical document taken from daily life—as illustrating the cloth-production process—and as an example of promotion—of the wares sold and of the owner of this presumably successful business and, in this case, his connection with the gods (Fröhlich 1991, 169–188; Clarke 2003, 95–129). These types of readings, however, smack of the rhetoric that most likely reveals scholars’ continued dependency on the legacy left by Petronius’ portrayal of Trimalchio. With Trimalchio looming large in scholarship, whether explicitly or implicitly, historians emphasize how this fresco celebrates work unabashedly and suggests that Verecundus, the owner of a cloth-working enterprise, is, perhaps undeservedly, the recipient of the gods’ good will (cf. *Satyricon*, 29, and the aforementioned passage 75–76). Put another way, because the image lacks any close connection with the Hellenic tradition, in terms of subject matter and general style, the default position is to fix images such as this in the mindset of the plebs, a mindset that is gleaned primarily from the unforgettable, albeit exaggerated, character of Trimalchio. The fact that the figure of Verecundus is labeled invites scholars to “know” something of the motivations of the patron of this fresco, in part because of the frustrating silence of non-elite individuals, save their artistic commissions. Clarke’s recent assessment makes clear this type of problem:

At the right—directly below the figure of his Genius in the big painting—stands the proud owner of the establishment. To make sure that everyone understood that this was the owner, the artist wrote “Verecundus” in small letters under the figure’s feet. He depicted Verecundus in a frontal pose, proudly holding up one of his offerings: a brown cloth adorned with purple stripes. Verecundus also seems to be modeling some of the clothing made and sold in his shop.

(Clarke 2003, 108–109)

Such a reading—and Clarke is not alone—depends in part on the assumption that Verecundus’ shop lies behind this fresco, which may or may not be the case, as the area behind has yet to be excavated, and that the individual shown is a proud Verecundus (analogous to the proud and boastful Trimalchio).

However, what if things are not as they seem? As we know, life on Roman streets was anything but static. The spaces of walls were in a constant state of flux, with graffiti and electoral slogans appearing and disappearing, just as elections and local gossip came and went (Franklin 1991; Kellum 1999; Hartnett 2003). Telling is the electoral *programmata* occupying the top portion of the pictorial field depicting the workshop setting. The electoral slogan reads: the felt workers want Vettius Firmus for aedile (*Vettium Firmum aed quactiliar rog: CIL* 4.7838; Franklin 1980, Table 6). What would happen to our reading if we considered the possibility that some passer-by added Verecundus’ name at the feet of the figure holding a garment, much like the graffiti/electoral *programmata* that adorn the top of this entire image, as

some sort of jibe, about what we may never know? What if the individual holding the cloth is not the proprietor, but a worker or merchant? If this is the case, one could argue that what is depicted here has less to do with Verecundus and his “self-assertion” and more to do with showing a successful business enterprise and its vertical integration (Silver 2009), as well as saying something about how Romans may have “interacted” with the image. We strive to know and fix something of the everyday lives of Romans, but many times their artistic commissions open the door to many more questions than answers, if we allow ourselves to ask questions outside of our preconceived notions, especially those that engage dualisms; these dualisms risk limiting our interpretations of the visual record in part because they tend to privilege elite or elite-looking art forms.

Future Directions

So where do we go from here? There is much to be gained from Clarke’s groundbreaking work, in which he ardently approaches artistic commissions from the viewpoint of those who paid for and/or viewed the works of art, rather than from the perspective of the omniscient scholar, who has inherited a stubborn tradition that favors Hellenic-looking/elite art. As Clarke reminds us, context is everything, in terms of artistic patronage and viewing among ordinary Romans (Clarke 2003, 1–13). As such, some images in non-elite contexts may actually poke fun at elite, highbrow culture (Clarke 2003, 160–180, 227–239). Moreover, as I have argued elsewhere, one course of action is to look anew at the evidence—that is, from a perspective in which Trimalchio does not dominate analyses of non-elite art—and see what else it might tell us (Petersen 2006). And finally, we would do well to think outside the dictates of styles and their attendant dualisms as we continue to explore the world of Roman art through the lens of social history.

A funerary monument will serve as a case study of the types of questions and readings we might bring to an examination of Roman art; it presents a world in which boundaries could be blurred, making images seem not quite as easy to categorize as they might at first appear (Petersen 2009). The stele of Longidienus comes from the port city of Classis (modern-day Ravenna) and dates to the Augustan period ([Figure 11.6](#)). As is typical of Roman funerary stelai, it contains both text and image. The composition is divided into three registers: at the top are typical portrait busts, in relief, of a husband and wife; the middle section displays the busts of two male citizens dressed in togas (only Roman citizens could wear the toga); and below is an image of a worker, dressed in a tunic, building a ship. The portraits and image of work both belong to the world of the plebs, according to Bianchi Bandinelli’s theory (1970, 86–88). Of the portraits depicted on this stele and others like it, he writes:

The old patrician-style portrait, austere and disdainful, no longer found favor with a society [among elites in the Augustan age] bent on proving itself more cultured and adaptable than its predecessors, and dazzled by Hellenistic elegance. Yet the type of portrait developed in Sulla's day [late Republic] went on for some time; it turns up, much later, on the gravestones of freedmen and small tradespeople. ... These were the funerary monuments of ordinary lower-class people, who had themselves commemorated in the same style as the *grands seigneurs* once used to do.

(1970, 86)



PLONGIDIENVSPICAM
FABR NAVALIS SE VIVO CONSIT
VII ET PLONC DENAT STACTINI

PLONGIDIENVSPERV FIO
PLONGIDIENVSPULPILAESB
INPENSAM PACNO DEDERVNT

PLONGIDIENVSPULPILAESB
INPENSAM PACNO DEDERVNT

Figure 11.6 Stele of Longidienus, early first century CE. Ravenna, National Museum, inv. 7.

Photo: Koppermann, Neg. D-DAI-Rom 1962.2149.

This reading is somewhat fraught, as it categorizes the stele as a plebeian commission; that is not an issue in itself, but such a reading puts the monument in a stylistic container and does little else. In addition, it assumes the primacy of Greek art and, oddly, an insidious trickle-down aesthetic, one that Bianchi Bandinelli otherwise opposes.

As a whole, the images carved on the stele could be read hierarchically as depicting a married couple and their family below, with the husband as the owner/overseer of a shipbuilding enterprise, which is depicted at the bottom with one of its workers or slaves. Moreover, the owner of this monument could be viewed as having contributed to the economic life of Classis and beyond, since it was not only a port city that saw an influx of goods, including luxury items, from across the Mediterranean, but one that also functioned as a base for the Roman navy (Clarke 2003, 118–121). Once the inscriptions are read in conjunction with the imagery, however, the picture becomes a little more complicated. The portrait of the husband and wife is accompanied by an inscription that identifies Longidienus as a freeborn Roman citizen, a shipbuilder, and as the patron of this stele that he commissioned for himself and his wife, who was a slave and whom he freed. It reads: Publius Longidienus, son of Publius, of the Camilia tribe, shipbuilder, built this monument, while living, for himself and for Longidiena Stactinia, freedwoman of Publius (*P. Longidienus P. f. Cam[ilia tribu]*) / *faber navalis se vivo constit / uit et Longidienae P. l. Stactini[ae]*; CIL 11.139). The inscription below the two togate figures provides some fascinating details; namely, that both, too, are former slaves of Longidienus, and that each contributed to the cost of the stele. It reads: Publius Longidienus Rufus, freedman of Publius, and Publius Longidienus Piladespotus, freedman of Publius, paid the cost to their patronus (*P. Longidienus P. l. Rufio / P. Longidienus P. l. Philadespous / inpensam patrono dederunt*). And, most interestingly, the inscription that appears in the diminutive plaque next to the shipbuilder reads: Publius Longidienus, son of Publius, busy at work (*P. Longidienus / P. f. ad onus / properat*). Longidienus is identified twice as a Roman citizen by birth (he is identified by his filiation, son of Publius, and his voting tribe) and was likely an individual of fairly secure means. Yet he also depicts himself, both visually and verbally, as hard at work in casual tunic attire in the bottom register; that is, not only as the overseer of his business enterprise, but as actively engaged in it, even though, as was noted, this figure could be mistaken for a slave working for Longidienus, save the relatively inconspicuous inscription. In any case, Longidienus and his family present themselves as propertied, freeborn and freed, and as active members of their community's workforce and contributors to the economy. While Longidienus most definitely belongs to the world of the plebs, or of ordinary (non-elite) Romans, his stele is more complex than that stylistic designation might suggest. The style of the letters and content of the inscriptions, for example, seem more at home in the world of well-to-do citizens. We would do well, I think, to consider this stele and its patrons' social standings (there are three men who contributed to the cost of the stele) as relative to each other and within the community at large, rather than in rigid juxtaposition to their elite counterparts in the city of Rome.

This stele is rather typical of funerary monuments discovered within Italy and throughout the empire. Museums and their storage areas are filled with such objects, but, paradoxically, very few find their way into surveys of Roman art. Plebeian or non-elite art is everywhere, albeit maybe not as conspicuous or grand as the imperial art forms in Rome and its Empire. This is a point that cannot be overlooked. However, until we question some of the biases that drive the elite/non-elite dualism (namely an unqualified valuation of Hellenic-looking art), and ask new questions of plebeian art (rather than putting it in a self-evident stylistic container), we will continue to construct a history of Roman art that places on the margins that which was omnipresent and which actually tells us a great deal about the Romans. Plebeian art should be integral to the study of Roman art and discussed positively for what it reveals. To test just how entrenched the values are that scholars have brought to the narrative of Roman art, I ask this rhetorical question: Could we ever imagine categorizing the Ara Pacis as *unplebeian*? Probably not, and I am not proposing that we do so. Rather, it is a question that invites us to think about the assumptions that lie behind stylistic designations based on dualisms, in which one side of the dichotomy is viewed positively (classical/elite) and the other side is viewed negatively, in terms of what it is not (unclassical/non-elite or plebeian). We also need to be forthright in acknowledging the limitations of such a paradigm. Roman art demands this of us.

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Much ground has been covered in recent work that addresses the meanings of art in Roman society, as a reflection both of cultural values and of the identities of those who commissioned it. For a good synopsis of the diverse approaches to a social history of Roman art, most of which consider art of the non-elite, see Stewart (2008, 1–9, 39–76). These methods have yet to be fully integrated into surveys of Roman art, however. An edited volume on the specific topic of plebeian art has recently been published (de Angelis et al. 2012). In particular, Tonio Hölscher’s contribution, “‘Präsentativer Stil’ im System der römischen Kunst,” provides a thorough and perceptive analysis of Bianchi Bandinelli’s term *arte plebea*, along with the scholarship that developed from his theory, while positing a place for the “präsentativer Stil” in the language of Roman art. See also the recent studies on freed slaves and sub-elites (esp. Bell and Ramsby 2012; D’Ambra and Métraux 2006; Mayer 2012). One should also consider Roman society’s rich material culture, which typically falls outside such studies but can be just as illuminating. For example, Penelope Allison’s work (2004) in Pompeii can point us in directions regarding how domestic spaces might have been used and thus something of the viewing contexts of art.

And finally, this chapter is deeply indebted to Clarke’s scholarship (1998 and 2003), which has judiciously challenged traditional ways of thinking about and narrating the history of Roman art. For example, in his 1998 book, Clarke offers rewarding readings of images of love-making that dismantle many stereotypical interpretations that have traditionally been made of them. In the process, Clarke rightly considers roles of non-elite women, as viewers of art, and their possible readings of various types of images. Due to limits of space, this chapter cannot do justice to the roles that non-elite women also played in commissioning art—from the

freed slave Naevoleia Tyche, who built a funerary monument for her husband and herself at Pompeii, to the many reliefs of women as workers—slave and free alike—discovered throughout the empire. On Naevoleia Tyche, see Clarke (2003, 184–187) with bibliography; on the reliefs of women as workers, see especially Kampen (1981), which remains the fundamental study on the subject.

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PART IV

Genres

CHAPTER 12

Roman Portraits

Jane Fejfer

At the beginning of his second book on painting, first published in 1435/6, the Italian humanist Leon Battista Alberti wrote about the portrait that it “contains a divine force which not only makes absent men present, as friendship is said to do, but moreover makes the dead seem almost alive” (Spencer 1970, 52). Alberti knew his Cicero (*Laelius On Friendship* 7.23) and was using him to persuade his reader of the importance of the portrait. However, the social and aesthetic significance that portraiture was soon to achieve among elite patrons and “super-artists” in Renaissance Italy was emphatically different from the use of portraiture in Cicero’s Rome. In the hierarchical Roman society, portraits were not a privilege of the elite, they were not (usually) seen as improper claims to power or displays of excessive personal vanity, and they were not associated with super-artists. In the Roman period, having a portrait made was open to a large part of society, ranging from the emperor to local magistrates, and even freedmen. Portraiture was adopted and adapted across the regions of the vast Empire and played a crucial role on the local level. However, just as importantly, it functioned as a signifier of the Empire’s global culture of civic life. Even though the Romans took over portraiture and the honorific statuary tradition from the Greeks, the publicly awarded and politically imbued honorific portrait statue took on a whole new dimension during the Roman period. It represented the greatest honor for which a local citizen could hope, filled the public space of the Empire’s cities, and came to represent visions and ideals of honor and power that were universal and valid all the way from the late Republic to the beginning of late antiquity. Portraits also became common in houses and tombs, where they reminded the visitor of the owner’s distinction, evoked the memory of long-deceased family members, and served as *exempla* to the younger generations.

Roman Portraiture: Fear of Oblivion and Anonymity?

The Romans saw falling into oblivion as an inevitable, natural process and were therefore excessively concerned with constructing their identity (Flower 2006). Portraiture was ideally suited to facilitate this desire for public prominence, as it pampered personal ambition and ensured eternal memory. In this chapter I shall focus on the circumstances of commissioning and making portraits, on the contexts in which they were viewed, and on their agency in the society that produced them. In doing so, I focus in particular on two aspects of portraiture: first, materiality, a portrait’s technical and artistic tradition and visual language, its format, its material, as well as the physical contexts of its display; second, the inscription that accompanied it. Roman portraits were almost always accompanied by a text. The text may simply be a name label or it may take the form of a long, mostly honorific inscription informing the viewer about the subject’s rank, career, and family relations, as well as a variety of

external details pertaining to the wider circumstances of its erection. Image and text were inextricably bound together in Roman portraiture. The portrait figure itself was the eye-catcher that immediately engaged the viewer, and challenged his or her mind to explore the individual. Faces have an immense cognitive effect on the viewer and, even though the relationship between viewer and portrait is “locked” because of the irresponsive and static character of the portrait image, the viewer reads the face and sees through the eyes into the mind of the portrayed and finds at first glance a being similar to him- or herself (Elgar and Campbell 2001).

In contrast, the large, well-carved inscription written on the tall base on which the Roman portrait figure was typically placed identified the patron, positioned him within the social hierarchy, and explained his role in politics and the euergetic system of this particular city. The inscription distracted the viewer from closer involvement with the image and encouraged him or her to read the patron’s roles into his physical appearance: the viewer inevitably correlated the patron’s written biography with the image, and its styling was expanded and perceived accordingly. Portrait inscriptions were very formulaic, naming the patron in the dative (in Greek in the accusative) and the dedicator in the nominative, and informing the beholder that the statue was set up in honor of the portrayed, usually by a city council. The statue therefore describes a social transaction and bond between dedicator and recipient, and was part of the social network, of the history, memory, and identity of the city (Ma 2007). Even in their formulaic form, inscriptions were expected to clarify details about social relations and aspects of the patron that could not be deduced from the image alone. In doing so, they could even contradict the message of the image to some extent and thus account for a multifaceted identity of the patron (Fejfer 2008, 30). Moreover, by telling the viewer whether she or he was dealing with a magistrate informing the public, a priest performing a sacrifice, a benefactor, and so on, the inscription set out the portrait’s interaction with its environment, which was further enhanced by the western practice of raising the statue up on a tall base to a total height of about 3 meters (Greek statue bases were usually low and wide). On occasion, inscriptions specify who paid for the statue, of what material the statue was made, and in what particular location and for which particular reason it was set up. These important details added further to the impact of the statue, just as they acted to inform their viewers how they could earn such a statue for themselves.

The inscription also served to secure the identification of the person portrayed in the long term. When displayed in the public spaces among several other portraits, which were all dressed in the same standard set of costumes, the honorific statue would only on a very general level be part of the city’s history and memory. The inscription identified by name both public and private portraits, and secured a continued impact of the individualized portrait. Portraits lose their agency when they lose their identification (Aristotle, *Poetics* 1448b.15; Dillon 2006, 1–8; Banville 2010). This may be just as true for the Roman as it is for the modern era: for the *Imagined Lives* exhibition arranged by the National Portrait Gallery in London in 2010/11, a number of well-known writers were asked to invent stories about some of the anonymous portrait sitters represented in the gallery’s paintings, in order to spark new interest in these otherwise unnoticed artworks. On a related note, Roman portraits very rarely carried artists’

signatures, which could have raised their aesthetic value or made them collectables; although they are sometimes praised in literary *testimonia* as adornment on the cityscape, they therefore only continued to attract real interest when the sitter was known, as the artist was anonymous.

Modern research on the nature of Roman portraiture relies heavily on these inscriptions. More often than the sculptures themselves, they were left *in situ*, and they survive in much larger numbers than the former. Even though most portraits can no longer be associated with their physical context or inscriptions, and can therefore primarily be studied as elements in the general evolution of portrait styles and self-representation, their former intricate connection allows for general conclusions regarding portrait practices in the wider socio-historical context. The long inscription *CIL* XIV 353, for instance, was cut into a base carrying a (now lost) equestrian statue set up in the forum of Ostia by the city council in honor of the *equester publicus* Fabius Hermogenes (Fejfer 2008, 66–68). Although it prioritizes Hermogenes and his benefactions, the city is the prime agent responding to Hermogenes' generosity. The benefactions moved the city not only to commission a statue, but also to choose a specific kind of statue and location, and thus a specific audience. Hermogenes himself (and the available statue formats) served as a prototype for the statue, which then exerted agency on the viewer in the forum. Emphasis is not on the portrait as a work of art or a product of a famous sculptor, but on the social interaction between city and benefactor, which materialized in Hermogenes' equestrian statue (see Whitley 2003/4 and the Guide to further reading).

Inscriptions can be analyzed statistically. They provide information about the social status of patrons awarded honorific statues in a typical Roman city, and thus tell us at least in general terms who the surviving portraits represented. In Rome after the Republic, there is hardly any epigraphic evidence for recipients who were not part of the imperial household, suggesting that the public spaces in the capital became mainly reserved for imperial representation, and that the portraits of private people were relegated to their houses and villas (Alföldy 2001). In provincial cities across the huge Empire the situation was totally different ([Figure 12.1](#)). In Italian *municipia*, the vast majority of inscriptions for honorific statues refer to local magistrates and benefactors, a situation that can also be observed in other parts of the Empire. Only about 10 percent of those honored were imperial officials. Senatorial and local women make up just over 10 percent. Portraits of the emperor constituted 10–20 percent, judging from evidence from other parts of the Empire. Even though these figures vary in different parts of the Empire, the general trend is clear: portraits were very much bound up in local history (Smith et al. 2006).

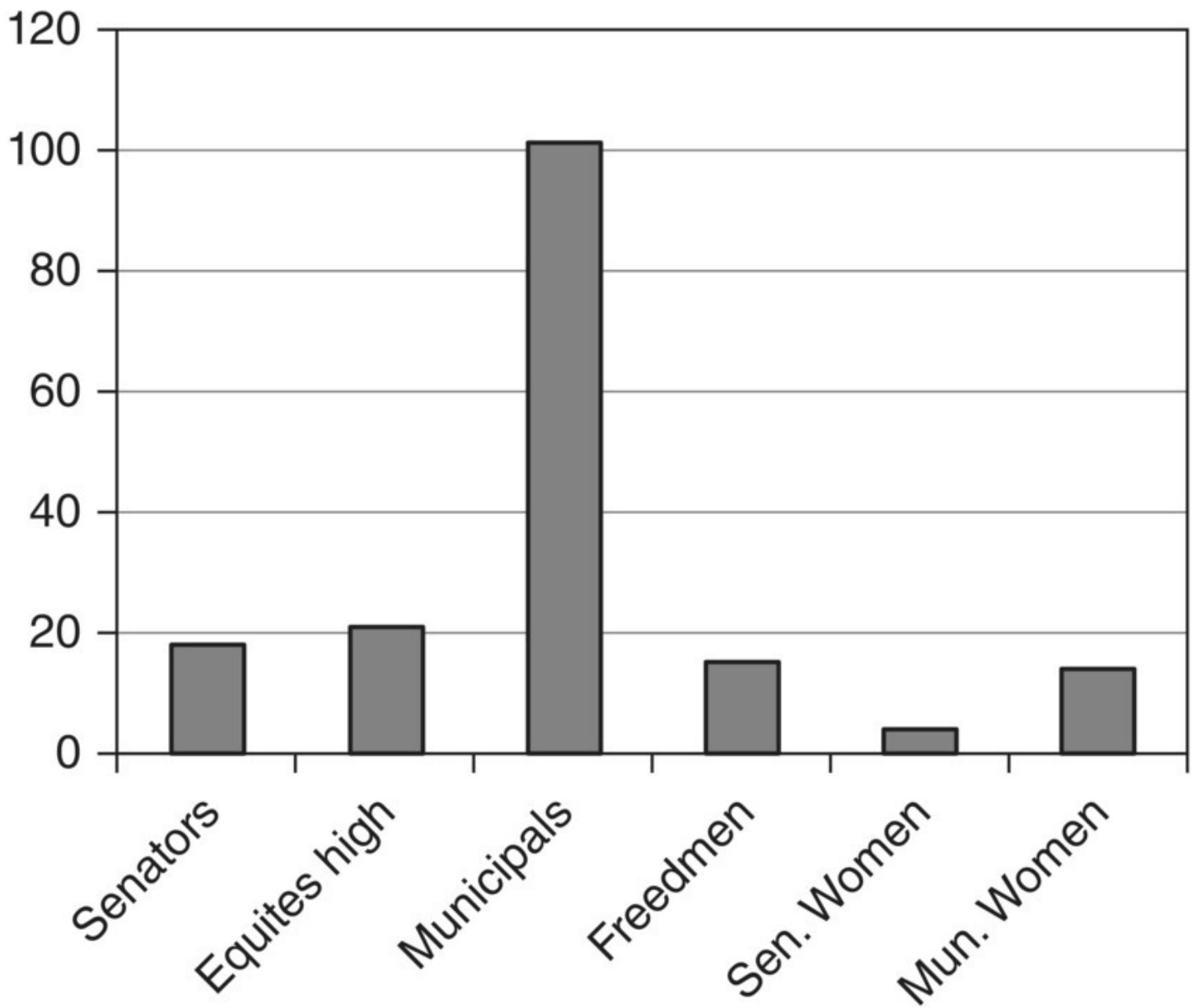


Figure 12.1 Histogram showing the social make-up of first- to third-century CE portrait inscriptions from Italian *municipia*.

© J. Fejfer.

Imperial officials and senators were fairly automatically awarded a statue, but local people earned their portrait statues primarily as a reward for pecuniary or other benefactions donated to the upkeep of the city. Among local citizens, competition for honorific statues, preferably to be displayed in the most conspicuous and busy public space (*celeberrimo* or *oculatissimo loco*), was tough and could demand continuous benefactions; sometimes the benefactor even had to wait for his statue until after he had passed away. However, the statue could have a long biography: epigraphic evidence shows that a lasting effect in city life after the inauguration ceremonies was desired. Some inscriptions lay down precisely how the statue was to be anointed with perfume or adorned with garlands of flowers and crowns on particular occasions, and how distributions of food and money had to take place regularly in front of it, sometimes “forever” (Fejfer 2008, 63–72). The statues were stand-ins for the benefactors,

ensuring that their persona was remembered and that they continued to have a place in local city life. Such stipulations also served to prevent the city from moving, removing, or even reusing statues, which happened frequently nonetheless. Honorific portraiture was therefore a crucial way for local people to shape their identities and histories, but the mingling with portraits of emperors and metropolitan officials in each city of the Empire placed portraiture at the center of a global, Empire-wide culture of civic performance, and shared values of honor, status, and identity.

Roman Portraiture: Likeness or Manipulation?

Cognitive neuroscience suggests that the first thing we concentrate on when confronted with another human being is the face (Bruce and Young 1998). How does this deeply imbedded human habit work with Roman portraits? Clearly, the Romans put much emphasis on the head as the carrier of a person's identity. Roman portrait heads in marble, by far the most commonly surviving material from which portraits were made, were often cut separately and inserted into the statue or bust. This and the introduction of the bust format at the end of the Republican period have supported the notion of the Roman portrait head as a separate self-contained representation, where the support added very little to the meaning of the image. The identity of the person was heavily associated with the head and face. This is supported by the specific targeting of the face of a Roman portrait statue when the public deployed *damnatio memoriae*, the obliteration of memory inflicted on public persons who had fallen into disgrace (Flower 2006; Varner 2004), as well as by the extensive reuse of portrait heads of "good" emperors by late antique emperors (Constantine reused those of Hadrian), suggesting that the identity embedded in the portrait could even be passed on when the latter was recarved (Prusac 2011, 69–72). We also learn from descriptions of these actions that the portraits were an embodiment of or a stand-in for the person they represented (Vout 2008, 155). The aspect of the portrait statue as stand-in for those not present is further supported by numerous literary sources, and indeed absence, passion, and longing are an explanation adduced by some authors for the inception and popularity of portraits in Rome (e.g., Pliny, *Natural History* 35.43.151).

What we do not learn from the sources is whether the Roman viewers saw physiognomy and facial expression in portraits as a point of departure for psychological interpretations. Probably they did not. I have already noted the crucial role of the inscription, and even the bust, which was suitable for display in more intimate spaces, and in which dress code and attributes contributed little to the overall message, is probably a response to the awareness of the power of the visual exemplary self, and not—at least not primarily—introduced for solitary introspective self-contemplation (Bartsch 2006). Portrait heads on busts do not usually boast more individuality or more refined techniques than those portraits on full-figure honorific statues. Presented elegantly with solely a name tag, the bust supported the portrait head, but it was not as strongly imbued with social and hierarchical aspects as the honorific statue: the bust format left it open to the viewer to construct the patron's status and role.

This raises questions about likeness. To what extent did the portrait image, for which the most common Latin words were *imago*, *simulacrum*, *vultus*, and *statua*, mimic the actual

appearance of the person? The normative format of the Roman portrait was the honorific statue, which originated in the Greek tradition of honorific statuary. However, Roman portrait heads do not fit standardized iconographic types representing specific categories of persons, as Greek ones do. From the late Republic onwards, they show great variety in physiognomic details (Zanker 1995). Literary sources suggest that *mimēsis* or similarity between image and person was relevant (Lucian, *Essays in Portraiture Defended* 6; Pliny, *Letters* 3.10.6; Arrian, *Periplus of the Euxine Sea* 1), but to what extent was it important? First, there is probably not a universal answer, as some portraits may describe the real features of the sitter carefully, while others do not; and second, Republican Romans were not used to exact copying, but rather to recognition memory (Small 2008). Today we expect a copy to be exact, but this was not necessarily expected by the Romans. It is not until the early imperial period, when multiple copies of imperial portraits were commissioned, that exact replication became common; and even in this process there was substantial variation among individual copies, especially during the Early Empire. Moreover, a number of female portraits raise doubts as to whether they are portraits of “real” persons or images of personifications. While some female portraits do boast strong physiognomic characteristics, most women were represented with little physiognomic individuality, so that we often wonder whether we are dealing with a real woman or a so-called ideal statue. This demonstrates how physiognomy was part of a social *construction* of an individual into personhood, and that likeness was a matter of choice, dependent on a number of factors that were determined by the patron, the sculptor, the person or institution that commissioned the image, and the target audience. Exact copying of a person’s real features was not necessarily crucial for the message. What mattered was that the portrait passed as a likeness; that the sculptor in his artistic investigation of the individual could refer to the sitter by means of style and seemingly realistic details; that the sculptor was able to bind the patron to the portrait, “animate” it, and imbue it with personhood in such a way that it was convincing, by means of constructed or real visual faithfulness.

Even if we disregard the question of whether the physiognomic characteristics of Roman portraits were true to life or not, key issues remain unresolved. When and where did this new trend toward a seemingly veristic style first appear and originate? What provoked its appearance and caused its further development in Republican, and especially in late Republican, Roman portraiture? And, last but not least, how specifically Roman is it really? The so-called death-mask theory, which saw the Roman portrait as a true-to-life, non-manipulating medium that originated in the practice of taking death masks, has now been discarded. Depending on their dating of the first appearance of verism, and on whether they believe verism to be part of a wider Hellenistic phenomenon that applied to portraits of Greeks as well as Romans, or a specifically Roman phenomenon, scholarly explanations include a wide range of assumptions: that verism originated from a new interest in psychology; an increasing interest in individualism; a reflection of how the Greeks perceived the Romans; a way to define the relationship between Greek clients and their Roman patrons; and the Romans’ attempt to define themselves against the many regions of the Empire, to name but a few (Rose 2008). Significantly, *imagines maiorum*, the ancestral wax masks described by Pliny (*Natural History* 35.2.6) and Polybius (6.53.6) as insignia of the aristocratic families in Rome (not to be confused with death masks), have recently reentered the discussion as

evidence for verism being a specifically Roman phenomenon (Rose 2008; Papini 2011).

There is now much evidence to suggest that the origin of the veristic style should be placed in the late third century BCE Greek world, and that the style was applied as a broad Hellenistic phenomenon. Rather than expressing diverse ethnic, cultural, social, or even personal identities, it was used to express shared civic values; its origin must be understood in relationship to a “boom” in the production of portrait statues set up to benefactors in the third and second centuries in the Hellenistic Greek cities (Ma 2007). While these portraits have almost completely been lost, the inscriptions on their bases survive. They usually first name the dedicating body in the nominative, followed by the name of the recipient in the accusative, describing a social transaction between city and recipient: the portrait statue is a symbol of *the* relation between city and benefactor. The statue is absorbed into the general history and social network of the city and the collective civic values override the individual. For this purpose, a portrait style was needed that neither suggested extraordinary or even divine honors as the heroic youthful images of Hellenistic kings and leaders do, nor was too closely associated with specific typological models such as that of philosophers. It is therefore plausible to connect the introduction of verism to this new development in the honorific tradition, which was closely linked to the euergetic systems in the Greek cities. Verism dwells on the particular, but here it expressed the general, and it played a part in the process of social transaction between city and benefactor.

As indicated earlier, when confronted with a veristic portrait of a contemporary sitter, the viewer’s first reaction is that this is a person like oneself. It encourages reflection about oneself. Idealized portraits, on the contrary, alienate the beholder. Verism worked to reduce distance between viewer and image (von den Hoff 2007), thereby encouraging the important exchange of benefactions on which the cities were so dependent. As many second-century BCE statue bases carry artists’ signatures, the role of the sculptor should not be underestimated in this process of formulating personhood in a new way. The veristic portrait does not say I, it says YOU and ME. Those who received extraordinary honors stood out from the rest not due to the portrait styles, but due to body modes (the most extraordinary being heroic nudity), due to the spot where they were set up, and sometimes due to the size and material from which they were made (Fejfer, forthcoming).

It is not until the very late Republican period that the multiple varieties of apparent verisimilitude developed further, into sometimes brutal depictions of bald or thin-haired old men with wrinkles, sagging skin, toothless mouths, warts, and so on. This is an Italic portrait style encountered in Italic cities, but also found in Rome itself (Zanker 1976 and 1995; Gruen 1993, 161–170). It represents a formal redirection from the Hellenistic portrait style, and it was relevant only for a short period ([Figure 12.2](#)). It coincided chronologically with the spread of the honorific habit to the cities in Italy, and with Sulla’s (consul in 88 and 80 BCE) policies that introduced, among other things, a much larger senate, which took in new Italic members. They stood outside the old aristocracy, and therefore possibly preferred to relate in their portrait styles to the honorific and commemorative portrait tradition of the Italic cities. It also coincided with the exploitation of marble: the use of marble had become much more widespread, with easy access to the high-quality white marble in the quarries at Luni. Marble

took polychrome paint much more easily and naturalistically than bronze, which was either left in its natural golden-brown color or gilded all over, and restricted the use of color to eyes, eyebrows, and lips inlaid in different materials. Bronze, therefore, could not create the same illusion of naturalism as painted marble could. When painted, these late Republican marble portraits may have made reference to the realistic wax images of the Roman nobility. Due to its apparent visual faithfulness, the extreme veristic style also promoted deeply imbedded Roman values of *gravitas* and *severitas* that were obtained through life-long experience that showed on the face (Giuliani 1986).

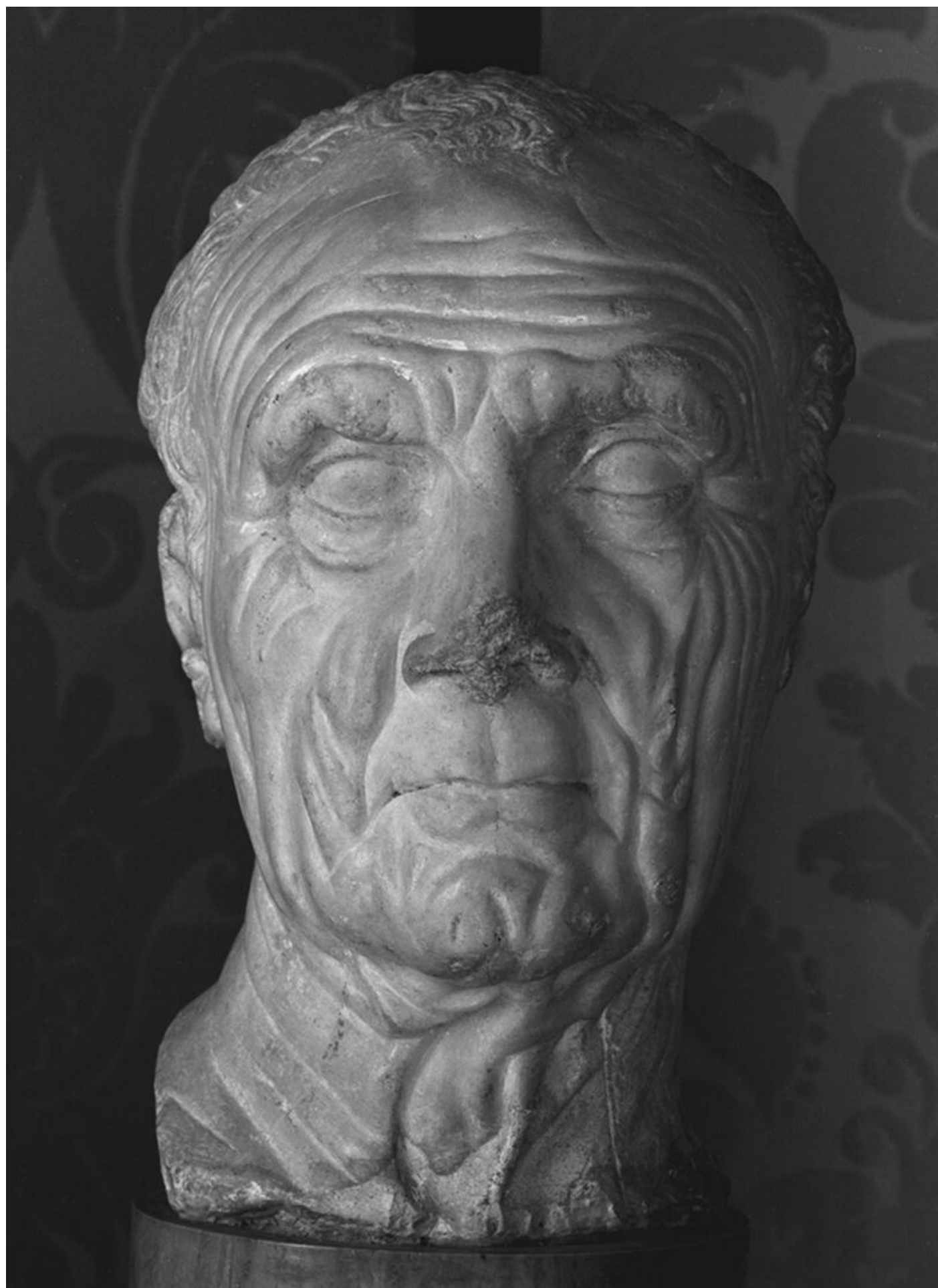


Figure 12.2 Late Republican portrait of a wrinkled old man. Osimo, Palazzo Comunale.

Photo: Rossa, Neg. DAI-Rom 75.1051.

Portrait Styles, Materials, and Chronology

Portrait styles of the second and early first centuries BCE are best known from the Roman east. Very few portraits from the west can be safely dated to that period, and it is uncertain just how widespread the honorific statuary habit generally was in Rome during the second century. Evidence is almost exclusively literary and much later (cf. the famous passage in Pliny, *Natural History* 34.14.30 on the clearing of the Forum in 158 BCE from portrait statues not approved by the Senate and the Roman people). From the first century BCE we are on much safer ground. Two distinct portrait styles can be identified: one that continued to draw distantly on the Hellenistic traditions, an example of which is provided by a portrait type identified as the poet of New Comedy, Poseidippos (Fittschen 1992). In the Roman context, however, this Hellenistic portrait style was often combined with body types showing heroic nudity, and was probably used for members of the high aristocracy, perhaps in their role as military leaders (Zanker 1983, 258). The other direction, the extreme verism described earlier, appeared during the very late Republic, and those portrait heads were often combined with togate statues and thus probably represented a much wider social group, ranging from high office holders to freedmen.

The extreme veristic style continued into the Augustan period, when it was eventually relinquished and most patrons preferred to follow the new, youthful and idealized portrait style of the princeps. The portraits of the emperor (and the empress) almost immediately became the iconic and unifying images to which the citizens of the Empire related, and which they imitated in their own images as a means of competing with their superior(s). Whether the ensuing rapidly changing, period-specific portrait styles actually originated at the imperial court or were created among the public and then also chosen by the emperors, such Empire-wide waves of fashion were only possible because of the efficient distribution, acceptance, and unifying impact of the imperial portrait.

Although strong physiognomy with emphasis on old age continued to be deployed occasionally among private, non-imperial patrons, it lost in importance due to a new emphasis on hairstyles and the increased artistic skill in rendering hair. The ever-changing hairstyles make the portrait our best source for the dating of Roman art. However, not everybody followed the fashions publicized by the emperor. There were always choices, and by choosing old-fashioned styles, hair even participated in the ongoing negotiation with the past or even the specific identity conferred by ancestry. Hairstyles could therefore express not only values shared with the emperor, but also specific personal or local identities (Smith 1998). Local preferences were not always limited to specific formal predilections, but could extend to aesthetic and technical preferences and traditions. This is most significant during the second century CE, when metropolitan Roman portraits were made with excessive use of the drill, a technique and aesthetic that did not find much appeal in the Roman east, where carving and modeling

persisted.

Emperors of the first and second centuries CE usually had lots of hair and were either youthful or of mature age. Nevertheless, there were a few exceptions, such as Vespasian. His first portrait type shows him as fat, old, wrinkled, toothless with sagging mouth, and almost bald, and the type was no doubt created in order to distance him from his predecessor Nero, who was represented with a long, luxurious hairstyle (Schneider 2003). Without any hair to support the characterization and to define the typological elements of the first type, the sculptor had opted for a very strong and characteristic physiognomy, which the viewer might have perceived almost as a caricature in a period when age could be indicated more subtly by paint ([Figure 12.3](#)). With age, the color not only of hair but also of skin turned gray.



Figure 12.3 So-called mummy portrait of a man with gray hair from Hawara in the Fayum. London, British Museum, inv. EA74715.

Photo: © Trustees of the British Museum.

Such sophisticated age differentiation, characteristic of the so-called mummy portraits, the production of which commenced around the middle of the first century CE (Borg 1996, 29–30), was also applied to the three-dimensional marble portraits, and added strongly to their expression. However, in most areas bronze, and gilded bronze in particular, remained the most honorable and most used material for the public honorific statue at least into the third century CE, to judge from the statue bases that once bore them. This was probably because bronze was closely associated with statues of gods, and because its use for honorific statues went back a long time (Pliny, *Natural History* 34.9.15). Bronze echoed public honor and importance, but one should not underestimate the fact that its surface was also extremely durable and suitable for outdoor display. A bronze statue was better suited to weather and being defiled by swallows and other birds that settled on them (Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortations to the Greeks* 4.46), and bronze could easily be recycled, even for use as chamber pots (Juvenal, *Satires* 10.62–64 on Sejanus' images). Only when gilded did it need to be regularly freshened up. Yet, in the course of the first century and in particular during the second century CE, portrait styles became increasingly dependent on marble (and paint) to unfold the full potential of their design (Smith 1998, 62; [Figure 12.4](#)). The strong contrasts of light and shadow achieved by deeply drilled channels and deep undercuttings in the rough hair, highly polished skin, and drilled pupils and irises, all colored, did not work well in bronze. Second-century CE authors talk about a *techne* that deceived the viewers and could make them fall in love with images (Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Greeks* 4.51).

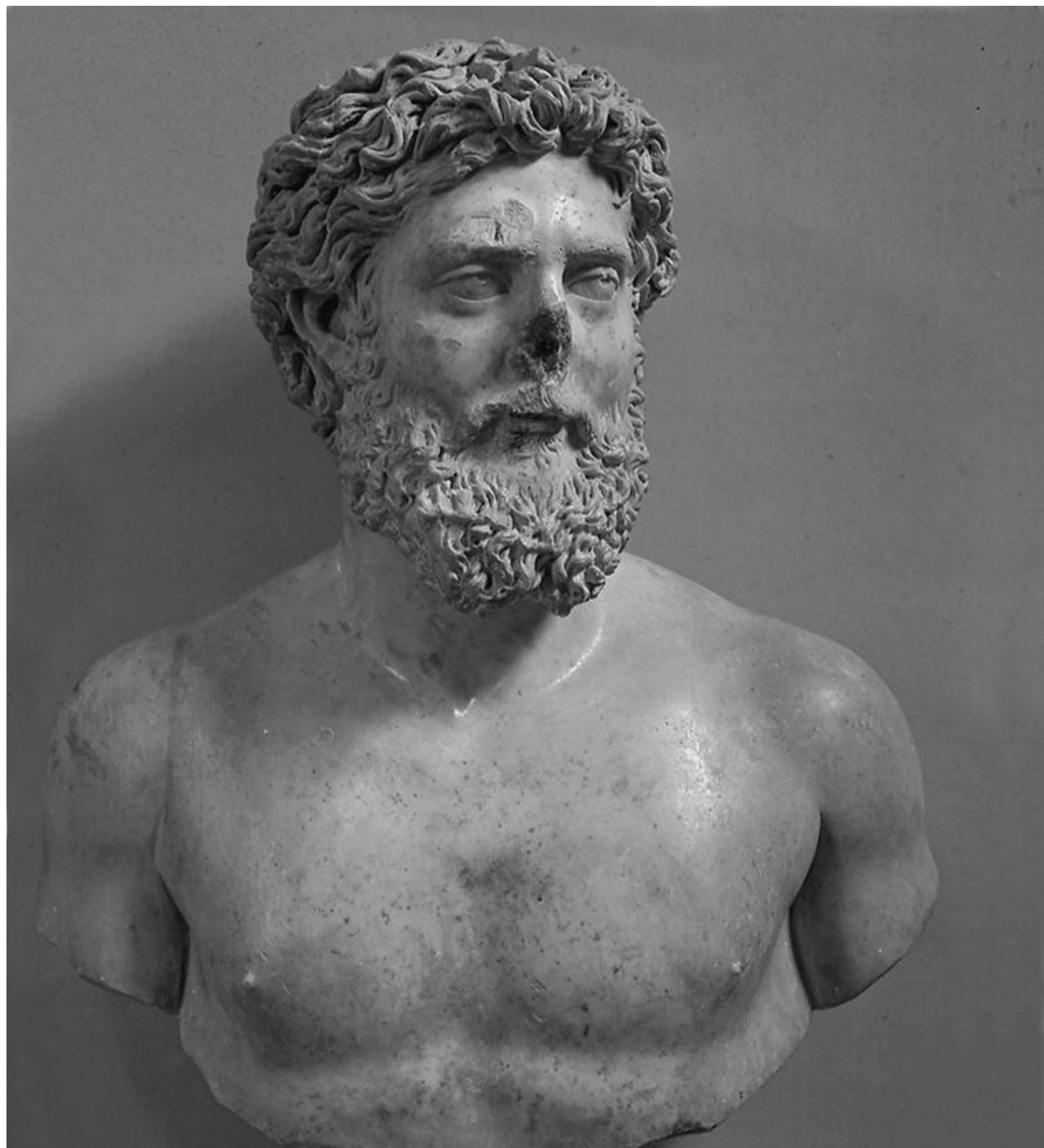




Figure 12.4 Antonine male bust boasting highly polished skin and deeply drilled hair. Teramo, Museo Civico. Deposito della Scuola.

Photo: Hutzel, Neg. DAI- Rom 94.1338.

This extremely time-consuming drilling and polishing technique continued to be applied throughout the third century. Simultaneously, during the second part of the second and the third centuries CE, the bust format became increasingly popular. This may be linked to a growing awareness of “selfhood,” but it certainly also suggests a shift in civic representation that led away from public attention and toward display in private spaces. Technical developments, social changes alongside ideological concerns, as well as notions of status and identity, local versus global concerns, personal preferences, and economic potential were therefore behind the properties and choices of both material and format.

Imperial portraiture was intended to project the cardinal ideals of each individual emperor. The ideological messages of imperial portrait types were designed to be comprehensible to the Empire’s vast and disparate population, which responded by copying the design in their own portraits, accepting the image of the emperor as a unifying icon. Emperor worship inevitably imbued the emperor with a super-human quality, but his portrait, which was styled according to the fashion of the day and combined with body types in the same attire as that of his fellow citizens, could blend in with any other honorific statue. However, the emperor’s extraordinary position could just as easily be stressed by adding to his portrait attributes exclusive to him, such as the *corona civica* and the *corona radiata*, by colossal size, or simply by displaying the statue in a particular context. For most inhabitants of the Empire, dialogue with the emperor took place via his statues. It was important that everybody participated in this exchange, and the portraits of the emperor were standardized accordingly so that he was recognizable all over the vast expanse of the Empire.

We can assume that such general ideological statements and recognizable features would have had the greatest impact if they remained permanent and stable, rather than being continuously revised. However, most emperors and empresses were indeed represented in several different portrait types. Some types were merely minor revisions of a previous one, while others were major revisions. Why is that so? Most scholars favor the “event cause”; that is, the assumption that each new type was conceived by a court sculptor, and distributed for replication on coins and in plastic art, to celebrate important events in the course of the emperor’s reign. The date of each of these new types is then usually established or supported by numismatic evidence. However, the traditional dating of imperial portrait types does not always stand up to scrutiny, and it has therefore been necessary to point to other events during the reign of various

emperors (hitherto considered unimportant) to explain the new types. This has not been difficult, as there were several events each year from which to pick and choose. If we leave aside the question of whether the emperor was interested at all in continuous event-driven celebrations of his reign, the more important question to ask is whether a hardly noticeable change in a portrait style should really be interpreted as a celebration of an important event. This seems a little far-fetched. What is more, the “event” explanation depends on a perception of imperial rulership as a strictly top-down model of control, which positions the emperor as the inventor of the ideals and ideas behind his portrait, and as responsible for its production and distribution. This model leaves little room for flexibility and for exchange with private people and their portraits. Surely, some imperial portrait types might have been conceived in connection with an event, but it is difficult to see the “event cause” as the overall general explanation. The changing portrait types of the emperor could easily be explained within a framework of sculptural workshops that were continuously engaged in developing, refining, and doing their best for the emperor’s image. This is particularly apparent in the portraiture of Octavian/Augustus. Five different portrait types of the first princeps have been identified, but only two of those, the so-called Actium and Prima Porta types, found approval and were copied and distributed widely (Boschung 1993).

Roman men across the Empire imitated the image of the emperor, but due to the latter’s characteristic physiognomy and strict typology of hairstyle, the viewer was usually able to distinguish between the two even when the context did not support an identification. This is different in the case of females. Roman women, both empresses and private women, were usually highly idealized in their statuary representation. Individuality was suppressed in favor of evenly proportioned and youthful faces; empresses wore hairstyles identical to those of private women, and there were no specific attributes (except for the diadem during the early imperial period) that identified a woman as an empress. This similarity between the empress and her fellow elite women was, it seems, intentional, and played an important part in constructing the imperial household as an ideal Roman family in which the empress constituted the connection to private life and a mediator of Rome’s elite family values ([Figures 12.5–12.6](#)). Ideals of female beauty with youthful, harmoniously proportioned facial features, and fresh, wrinkle-free skin were timeless, and only the ever-changing fashion of hairstyles characterized the woman as real. Yet, the hair of civilized, elite Roman women was always carefully styled and kept under control in buns, plaits, rows of small regular curls, and sometimes even under a net. A woman’s elegant hairstyle was perceived as a symbol of the civilized world. Long, unfettered hair signaled a situation out of control, and was worn by women in mourning, or by foreigners (Bartman 2001).



Figure 12.5 Portrait of empress Sabina found in Perge, Asia Minor. Antalya, Museum, inv. A3066 (head) and A3086 (body).

Photo: Gregor Borg.



Figure 12.6 Portrait of the local benefactress Plancia Magna from Perge styled like the empress Sabina. Antalya, Museum, inv. A3459.

Photo: Gregor Borg.

Nevertheless, there were alternatives to idealized beauty. Some portraits of private women boast strong signs of age using the same formal indications as the male portraits. This styling was no doubt perceived as positive and appropriate for a specific context, for example when the ancestral role of the woman was emphasized. The overall tendency in Roman female portraits, though, is that ideal beauty was more important for a woman's personhood than her actual age or appearance. Due to the sameness obtained through suppressed physiognomy, identical hairstyles, and body types, Roman empresses and private elite women were neither too public, nor too individual, nor too conspicuous.

Statuary Formats, Body Types, and Clothing: Social Markers, Role Models, or Fashion?

Three-dimensional Roman portraits were always presented on a support in the form of a bust, herm, or full-figure statue. Because many Roman portrait heads were made separately for later insertion into these formats, head and support were often separated subsequently. The heads ended up adorning museum galleries, where they are displayed “amputated” at the base of the neck, or restored with a modern bust. Since the Renaissance, the bust has been perceived as the quintessentially Roman portrait format. However, as discussed earlier, in the Roman period the normative format was the full-figure, about or slightly over lifesize, honorific statue. This was most commonly a standing figure, rarely an equestrian statue, and even more rarely a seated figure. All three versions, of which the equestrian statue was the most prestigious, could be awarded as honorific statues for emperors as well as private people, but they were also used to commemorate patrons in tombs, houses, or villas.

The way in which these statues were clothed depended on a number of factors. Roman clothing has attracted much attention in scholarship during the last decades, as it is considered an important part of the statuary representation, and a key to understanding rank, social status, identity, and gender (Edmondson and Keith 2008). There is much evidence for the Romans' attitudes toward clothing in the literary sources, but there is debate over how the visual representations relate to these real dress types; most notably, whether the costumes worn in statuary representations reflect what people actually wore. Most men in the Roman east continued to wear the traditional Greek *himation*, while men in the west were typically shown in one of three different costumes: the cuirass, nude, and the toga (Smith 1998; Cadario 2011). Each of these costumes represented a specific basic model—that is, high political and military status, extraordinary honor, or excellent citizenship—but could also take on further and much more specific meanings depending on their context. During the Republican period nudity and other divine guises as well as the cuirass were worn by generals and politicians as signs of outstanding, even super-human achievements, but during the imperial period, when displayed in public spaces, these costumes were reserved for members of the imperial family and very

few high officials. In people's houses, villas, and tombs, other rules applied and freedmen typically preferred the divine guise for their tomb statues. The toga and *himation*, however, were the typical civilian costumes and distinct markers of cultural identity, especially the toga, which could be worn only by Roman citizens and could, in combination with rank-defining footwear and stripes, become a strong symbol of political potency.

In contrast to male statues, the repertoire of statue bodies for women was much more varied, and none of the female body types denoted a specific public role (Alexandridis 2010). Only a woman's marital status was sometimes stressed by the addition of the long *stola*. All statuary types, except for nude ones occasionally used to commemorate women in tombs, wore the same pieces of garment, a *chiton* and mantle. The garments were draped in various ways, sometimes revealing, sometimes hiding the woman's body beneath, and body postures could be open or closed (Trimble 2011 on the Large Herculanean Woman type). Yet, all of these statuary types were copies or variations of much earlier Greek statues of goddesses set up over long periods in sanctuaries and temples across the Empire, including Rome. The only difference in bodily depictions of goddesses and depictions of "real" Roman women was the occasional addition of closed Roman shoes instead of Greek sandals, and of course the portrait head. Devoid of any jewelry and probably dressed very differently from "real" Roman women, these female statues most likely alienated the viewer, creating a large gap between the women of the city and the few who received an honorific statue, and thereby reducing the risk of jeopardizing social structures and gender roles. Perhaps the different kinds of costumes in which women were usually depicted in the bust format reflected what women really wore.

The abbreviated bust and herm formats had appeared by the end of the Republic (Fejfer 2008, 237–239). The herm, popular for representations of cultural figures throughout the Roman period, was used for contemporary patrons only for a very short time, whereas the bust increased significantly in both popularity and size during the early and high Empire. In its early phase, from the late first century BCE to the later first century CE, the small bust piece functioned as a support for the head that left it up to the viewer to construct the portrayed person's social identity, but with the gradually increasing size of the breast pieces the bust became more status conscious. By the late second century, it occasionally included both arms, with the hands sometimes holding an object. Although busts have been found in public settings, they were much more common in private spaces, suitable for display in houses, villas, and tombs, where they were placed on wall brackets or tables, or in niches where their surface color was protected against the weather, and where they could be appreciated up close ([Figure 12.7](#)). As the bust format spread across the Empire in the course of the late first century CE, it probably quickly became associated with metropolitan style and elegance, and was easily accommodated into the marble-adorned architectural spaces.



Figure 12.7 Busts on high bust feet of Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva displayed on a table. Section of a black-and-white mosaic *in situ* in the Villa of Lucius Verus at Aqua Traversa. The mosaic may show funerary games (according to Emmanuela Caserta).

Photo: By permission of Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali e del turismo – Soprintendenza Speciale per I Beni Archeologici di Roma.

Most male busts were nude or dressed in *paludamentum* or cuirass until the late second century CE, when busts also began to depict the toga, in particular the formal so-called contabulated toga, the most characteristic feature of which is a broad band of stacked folds running across the chest, suitable for colored ornamentation. It was introduced in the late second century CE and partly replaced the old early imperial toga. What caused the introduction of the contabulated toga? No doubt the traditional toga, previously so closely linked to Roman identity, had lost its iconic significance after 212 CE when Caracalla gave citizenship to free men across the empire, and the garment could be worn by almost all free men. The contabulated toga, however, was very rare in full-figure (honorific) statues, suggesting that it could only be worn by very high officials.

All of these factors—the growing popularity of the bust, its increasing size that could accommodate arms and hand-held attributes, the marble polishing techniques that allowed for

sophisticated coloring and were therefore not particularly suitable for outdoor public display, and the popularity of the toga costume for busts—seem closely interlinked with a dramatic change in civic representational habits. During the course of the early third century, the quantity of honorific statues declined significantly throughout most of the Empire ([Figure 12.8](#)), with the result that only high officials continued to be awarded statues. The reasons for this change in representational habits are not clear-cut (Borg and Witschel 2001). Probably, citizens were no longer interested in constructing large-scale public buildings and monuments, but now preferred to finance ephemeral performances such as games (Borg and Witschel 2001). The few remaining full-figure statues wearing the contabulated toga represented the small number of high officials who were still being honored with a statue, including senators with high consular offices, whereas most citizens were now represented in the bust format and displayed primarily in private spaces.

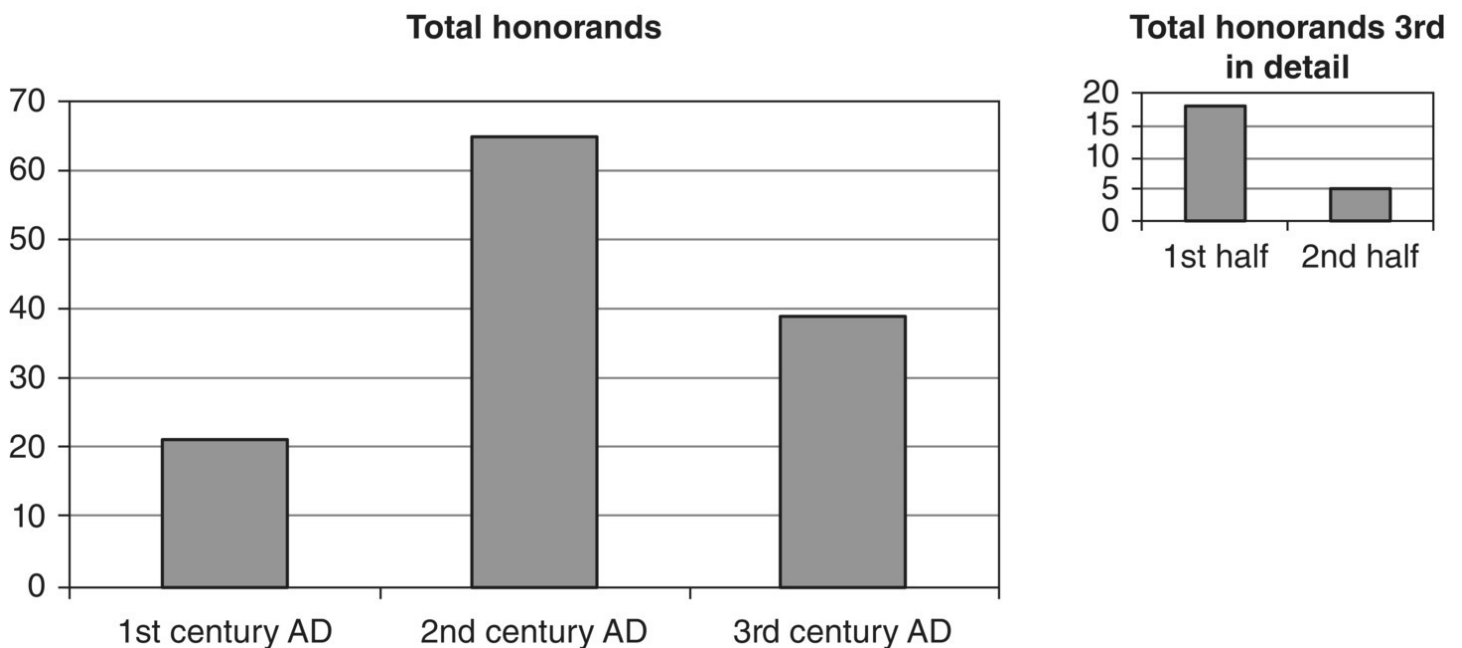


Figure 12.8 Histogram showing the chronological distribution of first- to third-century CE portrait inscriptions from Italian *municipia*.

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Portraits in Context

Dedicatory practices suggest that there were two basic aspects of the Roman portrait: a public honorific and a private commemorative one. These were mirrored by the place where the portrait was set up, by its format (bust or statue), its size (ranging from miniature to colossal), and its material. There is some evidence that certain styles, types of portraits, and qualities were preferred for specific contexts (e.g., high-quality busts from villas, divine guises in tombs, and so on), but Roman portraits rarely show even the most basic emotions of happiness, sadness, anger, and disgust. This makes the context in which the portrait was viewed all the more important, and it is why the same type of portrait acquired different meanings in different contexts. Context had the power of raising expectations: a portrait of the emperor placed in a

shrine devoted to emperor worship was more likely to connote divinity than when the same portrait type was displayed in a basilica where it presided over law courts and exuded authority. The same portrait type may appear mournful in the tomb, and authoritative and competent in the forum. Portraits of the reigning emperor were expected to feature in certain prominent public spaces in the empire's cities, just as portraits of local office-holders and benefactors were expected to stand near the portraits of the ruler. Portraits were never viewed in isolation, because their spatial context was the frame for specific activities and rituals, whether cultic, political, commercial, or commemorative. Obviously, the portraits were not only viewed during the course of those activities, by their sheer presence they became agents within them: the portraits influenced the atmosphere of these spaces; they influenced how the spaces were used and perceived, just as the spaces framed how a specific portrait was viewed. Neither a local nor a foreign viewer was ever lost—he or she knew exactly who the city's most important men and women were, because they were the ones represented in the honorific statues.

Recent studies of regional differences as well as of specific archaeological contexts have demonstrated how closely portraits were embedded in civic life (Smith et al. 2006; Fejfer 2008), and further investigations along those lines will strongly increase our understanding of how relations of power worked on both a global and local level, and of how gender and cultural identities were negotiated through the portrait medium. At the same time, attention has been drawn to the fact that technical aspects of production are not merely a reflection of practicalities or autonomous stylistic developments, but form part of the messages conveyed by the portraits. Scientific methods are being applied for investigating the significance of added paint (Østergaard 2010), and new insights into how ancient techniques and styles developed lead to a better understanding of social reality and practice, and of a world in which materials and their technical execution played an active role in people's lives. These new developments pose important questions about the relationship between technique and social practice: for instance, whether the highly polished facial skin of late second- and early third-century portraits should be understood as careful preparation for the application of sophisticated painting techniques. In my opinion this is likely, and may have become desirable, because the honorific habit shifted from the public sphere with its awarded honorific statues, to the private sphere with its busts that were displayed in a sheltered and more intimate context. There are also a number of what I would call paradoxes in the iconography and styling of Roman portraiture: the contrast between female fashion hairstyles and idealized faces and bodies; between veristic portrait heads and standard body types; and between veristic and idealized portraits. These were paradoxes or contrasts that the Romans deliberately produced in their portraits (some of them have been the subject of recent studies: cf. Hallett 2005); models adapted from other disciplines, as for example the linguistic code-switching model (Wallace-Hadrill 1998; Winther-Jacobsen 2013), may open up new ways of interpreting and understanding these contrasts.

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Smith et al. (2006) expound a wonderful example of how portraits functioned in a local context. Fejfer (2008) stresses the relative uniformity and stability of honorific portraiture as an expression of shared values and of integration into the Roman socio-political system. La Rocca, Presicce, and Lo Monaco (2011) is much more than an exhibition catalogue, as it includes studies on a wide range of important issues relating to Roman portraiture. Trimble (2011) is a study on the use of the so-called Large Herculaneum Woman statuary type as a portrait body for women of the Roman elite, and how visual replication shaped human experience, relationships, and meaning in a specific historical context. Alexandridis (2010) is a useful article summing up and reevaluating her own previous work on the bodily representation of Roman women. Edmondson and Keith (2008) is a collection of articles, all of which stress the social symbolism of the dress of both female and male elite patrons. An excellent in-depth study of the representation of the Roman emperor is von den Hoff (2009) on Caligula. Zanker (1987/1988) stresses Augustus' ideological use of the newly shaped imperial image. Evers (1994) combines art history and epigraphy in order to identify the workshops that potentially produced the circa 150 surviving portraits of Hadrian. Bartman (1999) is a detailed study of portraits of Livia and also incorporates epigraphic evidence. Boschung (2002) and Rose (1997) are both concerned with imperial family groups. For the typology and style of imperial and private portraiture, Boschung (1993) and Fittschen (1971) remain essential. For a broad study centered on beholder response to portraiture in western societies, see Brilliant (1991). The works of David Freedberg (1989) and Alfred Gell (1998) have had significant impact on portrait studies: Freedberg describes the emotional and psychological effect that images can have on the viewer, whereas Gell was concerned with social context and what "art" does. On portraits in a "Gellian" analysis, see Stewart (2006) and also Tanner (2007). Whitley (2003/4) has done exciting work on statues and their inscriptions as social agents.

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CHAPTER 13

Wall Painting

Katharina Lorenz

Roman Painting: Up against the Wall

The Romans produced and used painting in a variety of ways: in tempera or fresco technique; as panel painting in political, religious, and domestic contexts; as wall painting on temples, public buildings, in houses, and in the funerary realm; even to color their sculpture—textual and, on occasion, visual evidence demonstrates that. The largest corpus of Roman painting, however, comes from the walls of the houses, rural villas, and coastal retreats around the Bay of Naples in Campania, destroyed—and preserved—by the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 79 CE. Individual contexts in metropolitan Rome, Ostia, or Ephesus add to this and provide a picture of Roman painting after 79 CE, but more than anything they underscore how much must have been lost.

Wall painting serves, therefore, as a proxy for Roman painting and, perhaps more importantly, it does the same for Greek classical and Hellenistic painting, for which the sources are equally scarce. Their connectedness through fragmentary transmission aside, the relationship of Greek and Roman painting is, as is that of sculpture, most profoundly shaped during and after the conquest of Greece in the second century BCE, when many Greek paintings (and painters) found their way to Rome. The literary sources, first among which is Pliny (*Natural History* 35.1.5–10.34–41), report extensive collections of masterpieces of Greek panel painting, put on display for the public to enjoy in places such as the *Saepta* on the *Campus Martius*, the *Porticus Octaviae*, or the Library of Asinius Pollio in Rome; and Petronius' and Philostratus' work vouches for the existence of purpose-built picture galleries around the Bay of Naples, which the public could explore on guided tours (Petronius, *Satyricon* 83.1–6; Philostratus, *Imagines*). Most of these ecphrastic descriptions are either tantalizingly terse, or follow an agenda not concerned with providing a factual documentation of painting. All that is left of this splendid visuality of panel painting, over and above mere subject headings and random comments, is what Roman wall painters allegedly took as inspiration from it.

In this chapter, I will concentrate on Roman painting in the early imperial period, and in particular as it can be traced on the walls of domestic dwellings in Pompeii. This leaves substantial parts of Roman painting untouched; but the focus on a set of a reasonably well preserved and spatially and functionally clearly defined case studies will give better ground for a detailed assessment, which in turn should demonstrate what can be gained from studying Roman painting more generally.

Scholarship on Roman Wall Painting

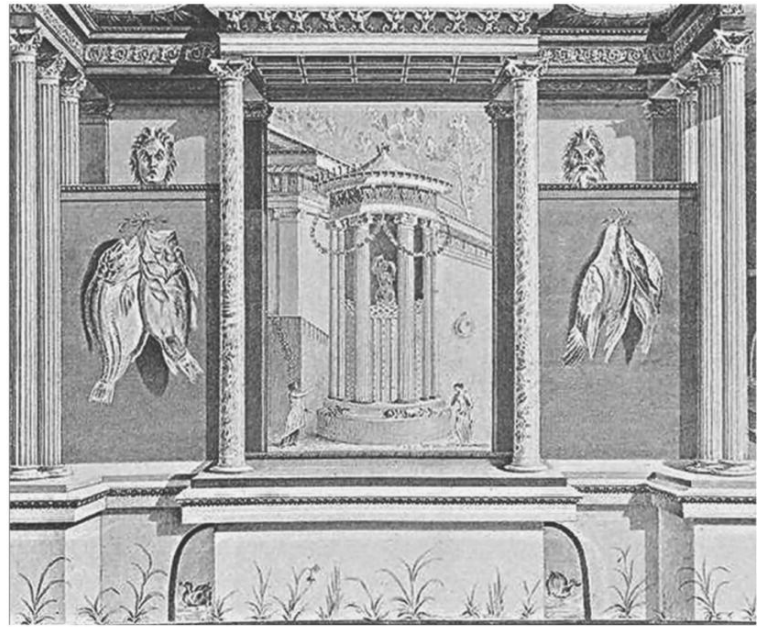
The role of Roman wall painting, and of Campanian wall painting from the domestic context more specifically, is essential for our understanding of ancient painting at large. The demands therefore put on this corpus of material in scholarly discussion are considerable, and they can be contradictory: Roman wall painting is simultaneously perceived as a cheap copy-substitute of venerable Greek painting, the principal exponent of Roman painting, and a particularly rich source for the cultural history of the Roman domestic context.

With these heterogeneous trajectories all at play in the scholarship on wall painting from the Bay of Naples, it can seem impenetrable to the non-specialist. Essentially, however, three strands of engagement dominate, even if they can sometimes appear intermeshed, each concentrating on individual aspects of wall painting and subscribing to distinct sets of analytical method, while in turn leaving other questions unanswered:

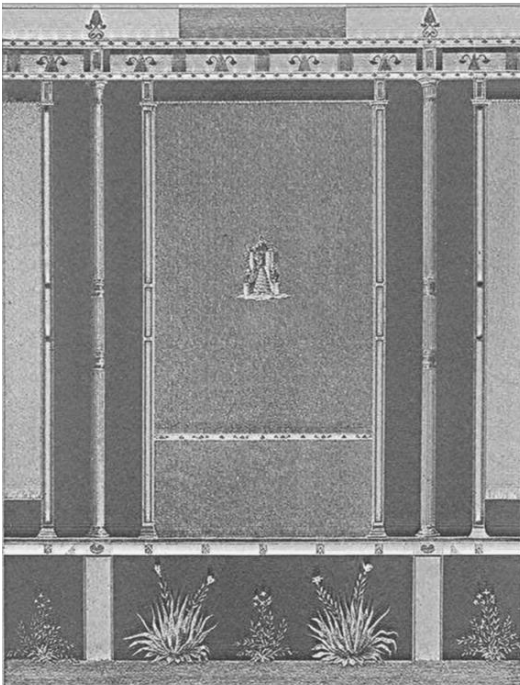
- *Copy criticism*. Popular in scholarship from the first decades of excavation around the Bay of Naples in the eighteenth century onwards, copy criticism sees wall painting as a secondary means, used to extract those elements that it shares with the Greek originals that might have served as its inspiration, with the outspoken aim to reconstruct them. This approach has been particularly popular with the study of mythological frescoes (e.g., Diepolder 1922; Curtius 1929).
- *Genre-immanent scholarship*. Devised as an explicit recompense to the quest for Greek originals, it refocuses on wall painting as a genre of Roman art and particularly its taxonomic, formal, and stylistic development. The founder of this line of argument was August Mau, who in his seminal study of 1882 categorized Pompeian wall painting into Four Styles ([Figure 13.1](#)). In contrast to copy criticism, his was not an interest in the creative genius of individual artists, but in the formative processes inherent in wall painting (Mau 1882; cf. Beyen 1938/1960).
- *Cultural history*. What is subsumed under this loosely labelled category are forms of analytical engagement geared not so much toward the artistic product (wall painting), but its viewers and its context, mostly in a socio-cultural sense. This pathway includes, but goes far beyond considerations of, style: it pursues questions such as the public or private character of individual areas of the Roman house, the relationships of power and/or gender in the early imperial period, spectatorship, the relationship between text and image, and visual narrative (e.g., Clarke 1991; Bergmann 1994; Wallace-Hadrill 1994).



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)

Figure 13.1 The Four Pompeian Styles (clockwise, starting from upper left): (a) Pompeii, Casa di Sallustio: atrium (10), north wall. Drawing: A. Mau, *Zur Geschichte der decorativen Wandmalerei in Pompeji* (Berlin, 1882), pl. 2; (b) Pompeii, Praedia of Julia Felix (now Rome, Museo Nazionale). Drawing: A. Mau, *Zur Geschichte der decorativen Wandmalerei in Pompeji* (Berlin, 1882), pl. 7b; (c) Pompeii, Eumachia Building, Crypta, south wall. Drawing: A. Mau, *Zur Geschichte der decorativen Wandmalerei in Pompeji* (Berlin, 1882), pl. 10a; (d) W. Zahn, *Die schönsten Ornamente und merkwürdigsten Gemälde aus Pompeji, Herculaneum und Stabiae I* (Berlin, 1828), pl. 89.

It would be convenient to regard these three different strands of scholarship as part of an

evolutionary development, from the “primitive” stage of copy criticism of the past toward the “heights” of cultural history of our own time. Yet matters are more complicated than this, and more interesting.

Hard Facts, Soft Skills, and the Spatial Framework

Roman wall painting is executed in *fresco* technique: the color pigments are applied onto layers of damp lime and sand plaster, frequently with marble dust, on rare occasion alabaster dust mixed into the upper coat to enhance its luminescence. With the plaster drying, the pigments bond with the coats underneath, to form a compact and durable paint film. If needed, further details can be added in *tempera* technique, whereby an organic emulsion is used to combine the pigments with the fresco coating underneath. Both Vitruvius and Pliny provide detailed accounts of the work processes and materials used in painting walls (Vitruvius, *On Architecture* 7.2.1–14.3; Pliny, *Natural History* 35.11–32); and there is ample evidence of unfinished paint jobs, documenting the individual steps (Ling 1991, 200–211).

The paintings thus produced—fixed to the wall and not as easily removable as panel painting—display a vast array of different themes and things. However, there are specific strategies with regard to what is displayed where: Vitruvius in his *On Architecture* assesses what he regards as “appropriate” decoration for individual parts of the *domus* (7.5.1–4); in addition, Vitruvius has a strong view of the stylistic development of wall painting, differentiating three stages (7.5.1–4).

Vitruvius’ comments confirm that the notion of the different stylistic schemes in Roman wall painting is not purely an invention by Mau. At the same time, they demonstrate that the central problem of Mau’s system is a feature already prefigured in ancient accounts; that is, the conflation of the concepts of formal design and temporal development (on Mau’s approach, see Laidlaw 1985, 17 and *passim*), the assumption that difference in form and style must be the result of difference in date.

The physical reality of Pompeian wall painting, however, confounds the legitimacy of such conflation, no matter whether ancient or modern. All four styles were still on display when the town perished: in some houses, the entire decorative scheme was kept over long periods, for example in the Casa del Fauno (VI 12,2–5) and the Casa del Labirinto (VI 11,8–10), still sporting the First and Second Style respectively, long after those had been replaced by the succeeding decorative fashions (for the houses, see Faber and Hoffmann 2009 and Stročka 1991, respectively). In other houses, some areas were redecorated in the contemporary style, while adjacent ones kept their original decoration, for example in the Casa dei Quattro Stili (I 8,17), thus labeled because it features all four styles across its rooms (Gallo 1989). Even more remarkably, in some houses decorations representing different stylistic stages seem to have been executed at the same point in time, for example in the Casa della Caccia Antica (VII 4,48; see later discussion).

The simultaneous appearance of the styles affords an explanatory approach that reaches beyond taxonomy and formalism; that is, a conceptual understanding of *style* as a bearer of *meaning*,

and not as a mere formal entity, seemingly welded to a specific point in time. Such a concept of style, which assumes a connection between the use of specific formal features and the subjects or themes to be represented, is widespread in the study of Roman sculpture, but still relatively new to scholarship of Roman wall painting, where its application is hindered by the convoluted legacy of copy criticism and genre-immanent focalization. Nevertheless, its usefulness has been confirmed in recent decades: scholars like Wolfgang Ehrhardt and Alix Barbet, among others, could demonstrate how the four styles are used on Pompeian walls to produce differing notions of space, rub up against room functions, and engage the viewer (Barbet 1985; Ehrhardt 1987; cf. Laidlaw 1985; Tybout 1989).

The spatial framework tracked in these approaches is the factor that underwrites many more accounts of Roman wall painting: its physicality as part of the built environment of the Roman domestic context beckons (and facilitates!) the collapse of the three strands of scholarship bearing on the Pompeian material already laid out, to provide a fourth route that plays to the strength of each, while also capturing the interstices between them. This integrating approach tackles the spatial dimension of Roman wall painting, its formal appearance (employing taxonomy and formalism), and its inherent meanings (appropriating methods from cultural history, with the occasional borrowing from copy criticism), to explain wall painting not as a proxy but in its primary function, as part of the Roman domestic context (Bergmann 1994; Lorenz 2008).

In the following, I will sketch out the distinctive spatial *mentalité* informed by wall painting and the spatial framework to which it contributes: an exploration of the four styles ([Figure 13.1](#)) one after the other, from the vantage point of how they engage their viewers and produce different layers of virtual space, generated in the in-between of wall and room user. This should provide both a traditional—for want of a better word—overview of the *hard facts* of taxonomic, formal, and stylistic development in Roman painting, and the *soft skills* to make sense of them for the wider field of Roman art, and Roman culture and history more broadly.

What should emerge from this is a picture of Roman painting as a genre intricately involved in the Romans' attempts at organizing the world around them, not as an *Ersatz* pastime, to make up for lost Greek masterpieces, nor as an aseptic and elitist artistic genre, as the paintings of our picture galleries are all too often perceived.

Outside In: The First Style

The First Style, also referred to as “Structural,” “Incrustation,” or “Masonry Style,” is a type of interior wall decoration, applied across Italy and the eastern Mediterranean, notably Delos, from the third century BCE until around 80 BCE. It is generally taken to evoke grand, monumental settings and revered values, such as *gravitas* and the *mos maiorum*. The walls are adorned with three-dimensional, painted stucco moldings imitating Greek masonry, comprising a socle with a flat, smooth surface; a middle zone of orthostates and ashlar blocks, usually with recessed margins to simulate drafted masonry; and an upper zone with courses of isodomic panels, topped with various types of entablature, including dentil cornices and, in some

instances, colonnades or triglyph friezes.

The Casa di Sallustio (VI 2,4), a house that took its shape during the second century BCE, gives a good indication of the ways in which this type of decoration contributes to the spatial framework and enhances interior space, with its First Style decoration in the *atrium* (10) and the surrounding rooms, including *tablinum* (19), a central reception room ([Figures 13.1a and 13.2](#); see www.medievalist.net/unityworlds/romanhouse.htm for a virtual tour). In the *atrium*, on the wall space between the numerous doors down the long sides of this rectangular space, a yellow socle sits atop a purple kickplate, and two purple string courses give structure to the middle zone of orthostates and ashlar blocks, painted in yellow, red, or purple. Below individual stuccoed cornices, large blocks painted with faux marble conclude the middle zone and lead to the upper zone, consisting of two courses of isodomic blocks.



Figure 13.2 Pompeii, Casa di Sallustio: atrium (10).

Reconstruction © Glenn Gunhouse, Ernest G. Welch School of Art and Design, Georgia State University (www.medievalist.net/unityworlds/romanhouse.htm), with kind permission.

In their original condition, in interplay with the tall wooden doors that screened the doorways, the *atrium* walls recreated the façades of Hellenistic Greek public and religious buildings, not at all unlike the façade of the Hellenistic tombs of Eurydice or Philipp II at Vergina of the late

fourth century BCE (Andronikos 1984). This architectural effect is further enhanced by the transitions to *ala* (17) and *tablinum* (19), in each case a wide entrance without doors: here, the corners are decorated with stuccoed pilasters, thus interlinking the individual spaces and turning the whole into a continuous external façade.

This impression, that one was stood on a public square surrounded by official buildings, chimes in well with the overall open character of this part of the house: the large space of the Tuscan *atrium* with its *impluvium*, the main entrance to the house, and the large opening from the *tablinum* to the garden let light and air flood through. Similarly, this externalizing decoration works well with the actual function of these open spaces as areas for meeting with the outside world, for clients visiting their patron in the *atrium* or *tablinum*, for example.

First-Style decorations in another open area, the peristyle, vouch for a similar interest in matching space and decoration: in the Casa del Fauno (VI 12,2–5), in a decoration contemporary with the Casa di Sallustio, and in the Casa dei Capitelli Figurati (VII 4,57; cf. Staub Gierow 1994), stuccoed pilasters are integrated in the First-Style decoration that adorns the peristyle walls, responding to the actual columns of the peristyle and thereby creating a double colonnade. Yet here, the externalized character of the space is not primarily intended to frame meetings with people external to the household, but to reenact the *gymnasia* and halls for perambulation of the Hellenistic world and thereby orchestrate life in its leisure aspects.

In some First-Style decorations, the use of stuccoed architectural elements, such as columns or colonnades, lead to an enhanced illusionistic rendering. This can usually be found in the more public areas of the house, as documented in the *atrium* of the Casa dei Sanniti in Herculaneum with its column-and-lattice balustrade, or in the *fauces* (entrance corridor) of the Casa del Fauno with their fully fledged temple façades on either wall. Yet *cubicula* (multipurpose bedrooms) in the Casa di Sallustio and in houses VI 15,9 and I 15,1.3 also sport colonnaded friezes in the upper part of their First-Style walls.

The First Style as a decorative scheme generates a monumental effect for the wall, and it is geared toward displaying considerable material wealth, notwithstanding the fact that all of these materials—colored marbles and alabaster—are only painted. And despite its regimented appearance and overall compactness, it seems to be flexible enough to account for individual room functions. There is considerable variation in decorative elements: orthostates can be flat or erect; the sequence of orthostates and isodomic ashlar blocks can be reversed; blocks can differ in size; and they can be painted and framed in various colors. The surface of blocks and orthostates can be decorated with faux-marble painting, but also with cubes and floral decorations (e.g., in VI 16,26 or in Rooms 31 and 44 in the Casa del Fauno), or even with other decorative elements, like a scarf in the Casa dei Quattro Stili (I 8,17), thus paving the way for the Second Style.

In Pompeii, First-Style decoration continues to be used until the destruction of the town, on the exterior of public buildings and temples, such as the Temple of Isis, redecorated after 62 CE, and on tombs. It is this continued use that also helps to throw into relief what makes for its attraction in the early period, and its use inside the house: First-Style decorations serve as a true, physical manifestation, rather than a mere visualization of monumental buildings.

Aligning, thus, technical and metaphorical space—the room as confined by the walls, and the room as defined by the notions and associations stimulated by its decoration—First-Style decorations lead to a quite remarkable form of *internalization*: they do not aim to instigate an illusionistic virtuality, but set out to create a whole new physical reality inside the house, and one with a distinct Greek sacral aura.

A World Beyond: The Second Style

The Second Style, according to Pliny invented by the Alexandrian painter Serapion (*Natural History* 35.113) and sometimes referred to as the “Architectural” Style, lasts from around 100 BCE into the last quarter of the first century BCE. While the decorations of the First Style generated an actual three-dimensional space, welding technical and metaphorical space together into one and the same form of presentation, they are kept apart in the Second Style; its informing concept rests on the creation of virtual spaces in two-dimensionality, employing illusionistic rendering to push beyond the confines of the room.

In his detailed study of the Second Style, a prime example of genre-immanent formalist scholarship, H.G. Beyen (1938/1960) distinguished two phases within which this process takes place. His classification is still valid today, albeit with minor chronological adjustments: the first phase lasts from 100 to 50/40 BCE, split into three subphases (Ia-b-c); and the second from the middle to the end of the century, divided into two subphases (IIa-b).

The decorative schemes of Beyen’s first phase are comparable to the overall appearance of the First Style in their structure, even though all features are now translated into a different technique; that is, fresco painting. The beginnings are best documented in the Casa dei Grifi on the Palatine in Rome (Iacopi 1991). By means of painting alone, Room (II) is turned into a particularly exclusive type of Hellenistic indoor space, an *oecus corinthius*: a middle zone of erect orthostates, some of which are painted in a way to give the impression of lavish onyx slabs, is set atop a pedestal of painted faux-marble inlays (*opus scutulatum*). Above sits a painted cornice, followed by courses of isodomic blocks. The ensemble is completed by a painted colonnade, resting on large bases set in front of the marble socle on top of the wall’s extended kickplate, and supporting a coffered ceiling. The spatiality of the composition is enhanced by light-and-shadow effects and foreshortening.

Later, but still within Beyen’s first phase, the decoration becomes more elaborate and extravagant, with increasing numbers of different layers of painted architecture presented in front of each other. The upper zone is now frequently opened up to reveal open spaces beyond the tangible physicality of the technical space, as seen in the decoration of *cubicula* (a) and (c) in the Villa dei Misteri, dated to the 80s BCE. From here, it is only a short step to the illusionistic walls of Villa A at Oplontis ([Figure 26.9](#)), the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor in Boscoreale, or the Casa del Labirinto at Pompeii (VI 11,8–10), all decorated about two decades later (Oplontis: Clarke 1996; Boscoreale: Bergmann et al. 2010). Their walls are rendered to imitate the architectural settings of Hellenistic palaces, with features also reminiscent of the *scaenae frontes* of stage painting: colonnaded doorways alternate with

aediculae, opening vast architectural vistas, all rendered in luxurious and expensive materials, and with objects such as shields, votive vessels in metal or glass, or theater masks and peacocks adding yet another layer of richness, and showcasing the craftsmanship of the painters who created these illusionistic tableaus.

In Beyen's second phase, comprising developments much despised by Vitruvius (*On Architecture* 7.5.3–4), the central *aediculae* no longer open the view onto infinite architectural landscapes, but they are turned almost into shop windows to display generic, sacred landscapes or, toward the very end of the Second Style, mythological scenes located in the countryside. The type of pictorial space developed here shares characteristics with more extensive decorations, with the *megalographia* (large-scale) paintings starting earlier in the Second Style and documented in the large *oeci* of the Villa dei Misteri, the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale ([Figure 13.3](#)), and the Casa del Sacello Iliaco (I 6,4); and with the popular narrative friezes or frieze-like panels, such as the scenes from the *Iliad* in the Casa del Criptoportico (I 6,2).



Figure 13.3 Megalographie from the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale.

Photo: Anagoria/Wikimedia Commons.

The most prominent contexts to showcase this second phase are the houses in Rome, for example the House of Augustus on the Palatine, fairly precisely dated to the years between 36 and 28 BCE, with its sacro-idyllic panels in the center of architectural *skenographiae* (on the decoration Iacopi 2008; some wall designs in the Praedia of Iulia Felix in Pompeii are comparable: [Figure 13.1b](#)); the Aula Isiaca with its expanded landscapes developing across entire walls and screened by architecture (Iacopi 1997); and the House of Livia with its yellow landscape frieze and its large panels depicting Io and Argus, and Polyphemus and

Galatea. On the other side of the Tiber, the Villa Farnesina displays yet more architectural *skenographiae* with central sacro-idyllic panels, decorative elements that recall *pinacothecae*, the picture galleries so popular with the Roman upper classes ([Figure 6.4](#)), and it also features remarkable frieze compositions including the famous *Aldobrandini Wedding* (Villa Farnesina: Mols and Moorman 2008).

Evidence for such features from Pompeian houses is in line with that from metropolitan Rome and, albeit not quite as lavish, similarly striking. In the grand *oecus* (3) of the Casa di Obellius Firmus (I 14,4), an elaborate architectural *skenographia* with a female figure (Iuno?) standing in a slightly opened doorway is on display on the east wall. It is contrasted on the south wall with a central *aedicula* that frames a large panel, depicting three women in a sacred landscape (Electra?); *en passant* documenting that Beyen's individual subphases can happily appear together in the same room.

Second-Style decorations increasingly distance the images, their subjects, and the associations they can trigger from the actual space of the room (Tybout 1989, 31). In this way, the Second Style presents a considerable toning down of the radical, three-dimensional solutions developed in the First Style. Yet at the same time, in moving away from physical three-dimensionality, the Second Style heralds an altogether more fundamental shift; that is, toward illusionistic virtuality. It falls to the viewer to weld together the two, now distinct conceptions of technical and metaphorical space—the physical reality of the built environment and the fictitious storyscapes generated by the decoration—and map out an altogether different cognitive environment in the domestic sphere.

Consolidating the Virtual in the Real: The Third Style

The Third Style spans the years from the last quarter of the first century BCE until just before the middle of the first century CE, with the Pyramid of Cestius and the paintings in its tomb chamber providing a chronological fix point. The style is characterized by the disappearance of the all-encompassing illusionistic paintings so typical of the Second Style. The architectural structures and vistas are dismantled into individual motives, and, downsized significantly, come to be relocated to the upper part of the walls. The central zones are now covered with large, monochrome fields, with a double tripartite structure: vertically, by precisely executed, delicate, and stylized ornamental elements, such as candelabra or slender columns; horizontally, by vegetal ornaments or by borders with minute decorative elements. A decorative scheme ensues that oozes elegance and simplicity, albeit of a rather elaborate kind. Set within these muted surroundings and framed by matching, filigreed *aediculae*, central panels become ever more popular as the focus of the walls. The north wall of the so-called *camera rossa* from the Villa of Agrippa Postumus at Boscotrecase, fairly securely dated to the first decade CE, is most frequently called on to showcase the characteristics of the Third Style (cf. [Figure 13.1c](#), the Crypta decoration in the Building of Eumachia in Pompeii).

The Third Style mediates between a taste for opening the wall onto a space beyond, so popular with the decorations of the Second Style, and new trends to close it, to confirm it as a proper

wall and direct the attention back into the room. The decoration of the imposing *oecus* (A) in the Villa Imperiale (Pappalardo, Ciardiello, and Grimaldi 2008), an early example of a Third-Style design, shares various characteristics with those of the late Second Style. The socle is rendered on an imaginary plane in front of the actual wall, supporting slender columns with caryatids on top, underpinning in turn an architrave. Likewise, the central painted *aedicula* seemingly extends into the room in front, with the pedestals of its two columns and the architrave depicted in a sharp angle to the wall surface, and with the indication of shadows to enhance spatiality.

Nevertheless, this instance of shaping space by means of pictorial illusionism remains an isolated event. Instead, the sparse architectural motifs that have been pushed into the upper zone are depicted in a white void, almost without any illusionistic extension of space (the decorations on black ground above are renovations of the Fourth Style). The middle zone no longer provides a stage for landscapes or such like, as we see them in the otherwise comparable decorations in the Villa Farnesina or the Aula Isiaca of the late Second Style; only a small frieze between socle and middle zone features scenes of Eros and Psyche on black ground. Instead, these figurative scenes are now located in clearly demarcated areas: a large panel in each of the *aediculae*, depicting a mythological scene embedded in a landscape, but with comparatively more volume allocated to the figures than even in the panels from the Casa di Livia; and with small rectangular panels in the upper zone, two per wall, depicting scenes with reciting poets.

The figure scenes have replaced the architectural vistas and provide a different type of experience: they may show landscapes, but these are not presented as if extending beyond the wall of the room, as they are, for example, in the Odyssey Landscapes from the Esquiline. Scenes like those in the Villa Imperiale are unmistakably characterized as pictures hanging on the wall. And this impression is reinforced in the poets' panels in *oecus* (A), which—flanked by painted wooden shutters—are designed to imitate actual wooden panel paintings in need of protection against the sun.

It would, however, be missing the central point of these panels to assume that Roman painting in the Third Style is no longer invested in the dichotomy of illusion and reality that is, in different ways, played out in the First and the Second Styles. However, instead of emulating space—by means of physical illusion, as in the First Style; or painted illusion, as in the Second—Third-Style decorations work toward fully immersive environments that are concerned with the production of individual experiences, spatial and otherwise; a trend then fully developed in the Fourth Style.

The arrangement of the mythological panels in *triclinium* (b) in the Casa del Sacerdos Amandus (I 7,7) provides an indicator of the direction of this new design. Set in a house of modest size, the four scenes display Heracles with the Hesperides (east), Daedalus and Icarus (south), Polyphemus and Galatea (west), and Perseus and Andromeda (north; [Figure 13.4](#)). Differing connections can be formed between these four panels, playing out contrasts and similarities. The pictures in the west and south—for example, Polyphemus and Galatea and Perseus and Andromeda—both show men and women around the theme of loving relationships,

but they do so in different ways: while Perseus is shown as successful in securing his partner, Polyphemus fails. Then again, the scene with Heracles and the Hesperides, on the wall facing the entrance to the room, contrasts with the three others because it is not poly-scenic, as they are, and is not set in a vast landscape.



Figure 13.4 Pompeii, Casa del Sacerdos Amandus: triclinium (b), north wall.

Photo: Katharina Lorenz.

Around these contrasts and similarities an elaborate game of inter-visibility develops in the room (Bergmann 1999; Lorenz 2008, 299–302). The viewer serves as a catalyst for these

threads, tasked with combining the diverse servings into an experiential whole, gaining both insight into entertaining stories and the opportunity to relate to the norms and values that they represent (or put into question). With this, the decoration and its content are no longer confined to the wall, but emanate the room, heralding a profound change in the way in which illusion is approached: not as essentially removed from reality, but as a category that can be mixed up with it.

Immersion, Not Emulation: The Fourth Style

August Mau hardly discussed the Fourth Style, perceiving it as a marker of the decline of Pompeian painting (Mau 1882). It was left to those who followed to devise a more positive evaluation of the wall painting from the second half of the first century CE, which makes for the largest corpus of Roman wall painting, not least because of the extensive redecorations that took place after the earthquake of 62 CE that destroyed large parts of the Campanian towns ([Figure 13.1d](#)). Karl Schefold (1952, 171) initially identified the Neronian period as the beginning of the Fourth Style, assuming that the flamboyant emperor was the driving force behind its “baroque,” “theatrical,” and generally “illusionistic” character. This assessment has been revised, and a starting date in the Claudian period is now generally assumed in scholarship (Strocka 2007, 317).

During the Fourth Style, the decorations gained a new range of variety. In early versions, such as in the upper peristyle in the Villa of San Marco (Barbet and Miniero 1999), the walls appear broken up: the central fields in the middle zone are still largely monochrome (in this case, white), as they were in Third-Style designs, but they are surrounded by various embroidery-like borders, so that the overall effect is considerably more colorful and piercing than previously.

This impression is advanced by the appearance of a whole range of further decorative enhancements: cupids floating in the center of each middle field, small vignettes on the dividing borders, friezes with scenes of a marine thiasus further up. Most remarkable, however, is the reemergence of architectural vistas in the middle zones. They are once more three-dimensional, but the architectural concoctions presented here tend to be illogical and can include heavy architectural elements such as architraves resting on delicate supports.

Another, more modest context, the Casa del Principe di Napoli in Pompeii (VI 15,7.8: Strocka 1984), demonstrates that the core idea of this decorative scheme is not influenced by the class or size of the dwelling that it adorns: in *triclinium* (k), an assortment of cupids and peacocks, eagles, griffins, panthers, antelopes, and swans, garlands and wine-leaves, thymiateria (incense burners), tendrils, vegetal stalks and bucrania (ox skulls) populate the walls. The mythological panels in the same room help to trace the development of this decorative element: here, they appear shrunken in size compared to those in the Villa Imperiale or the Casa del Sacerdos Amandus, from large and rectangular to small and quadratic; and they now focus primarily on the figures, without much elaboration of their surroundings.

In line with this, the mythological panel in *triclinium* (k) depicting Perseus and Andromeda

displays a new emphasis with regard to content. While in the Casa del Sacerdos Amandus the panel of the same myth was presented as an action-packed adventure, set in a wild landscape, its Fourth-Style reworking in the Casa del Principe di Napoli sees the emergence of an entirely new episode: the two heroes appear in a close embrace, calmly watching the reflection of the Gorgoneion in a pool in front of them. Gone is the action, and the story is instead repackaged with notable emphasis on the mythical protagonists and their relationship.

This interest in individual characters and their condition constitutes a trademark of Fourth-Style decorations, and it follows on from the interest in generating immersive environments first notable in the Third Style: with zooming in on the mythological figures, the scope for connections to form between viewer and picture, and between reality and illusion, increases. The result is the emergence of a range of different spatial designs throughout the Neronian and Vespasianic periods, all connected by a shared interest in creating environments that continuously challenge and renegotiate the relationship of technical and metaphorical space. It is this emphasis on the processual character of space that facilitates immersive virtuality and sets these decorations off from those of the First and Second Styles.

The example of the Casa della Caccia Antica in Pompeii (VII 4, 48) can throw this further into relief. The house displays a wide range of different Fourth-Style decorations across its rooms, ranging from fantastic architectural vistas to the more austere Panel Style. Yet despite the stylistic differences, careful analysis of the plaster shows that the decoration of most parts of the house was executed at the same time as the *atrium*; and impressions of Vespasianic coins found in *atrium* (2), either side of the doorway to *fauces* (1), firmly place that decoration to the years between 71 and 79 CE (Allison and Sear 2004, 83–84).

With the décor of the house thus confirmed as belonging to the same chronological horizon, notwithstanding its stylistic diversity, the material evidence profoundly undercuts any assumptions that form and taxonomy alone could explain its character. And yet, when scrutinized with regard as to how virtuality, and with it the relationship of reality and illusion, is negotiated in the decoration, it becomes clear that the mix of styles in operation blends illusionistic elements borrowed from the Second Style with the classicism of the Third in order to create non-homogeneous spaces; non-homogeneous in the sense that technical and metaphorical properties of space are spliced in various ways, to maintain a dynamic relationship.

This is particularly obvious in the decoration of *tablinum* (10). While vistas interspersed in the lower part of the middle zone are reminiscent of the Second Style in pointing to illusionistic space beyond the confines of the wall, the closed appearance of the middle zone adopted from the Third Style puts the focus on the figural decoration and back into the room: its emphasis on two mythological figures and their interaction affords audience-led, discursive forms of interaction ([Figure 13.5](#)). This results in a range of atmospheric layers pervading the room; and these can support multiple forms of viewing.



Figure 13.5 Pompeii, Casa della Caccia Antica: tablinum (10), west wall; Perseus and Andromeda.

Photo: D-DAI-Rom: 1977.0256.

Similar strategies are employed in the decoration of the most important example of Fourth-Style decoration, Nero's palace in Rome, the Domus Aurea (Iacopi 1999). Corridor (50), for example, presents above a high socle of marble cladding a multicompartmentalized *scaenae frons*, with two registers and a central aedicula. Each of the six compartments in the lower register has a figure sitting or standing inside, and another one appears in the central aedicula. This arrangement has a twofold effect: on the one hand, with the wall designed in clear central perspective, the viewers have to orient themselves toward the wall; not an inconsiderable feat,

given that this room is a long and fairly narrow passageway, which makes it difficult for the viewers to take in the overall composition (Leach 2004, 115). The figures amid the scenery, however, generate a very different form of reception: in their various space-consuming poses, they can almost enclose and thus follow the viewers. This suspends the centralizing powers of the architectural decoration and creates an effect of pervasive presence.

Decorations such as these, designed as highly dynamic, seem to be ideally suited to facilitate their audience's mobility, both in terms of the physical acts and the conceptual perspectives that they can open up. And so Fourth-Style decorations contribute to a situation in which the audience's experience is rendered immersive not by overcoming the limits of architecture and carrying them off into fantastic landscapes, but by assailing them with differing trajectories for a viewer experience, with the channeling powers of architecture and images combined.

Roman Painting: Toward a Holistic Viewing

When approached within its spatial framework, Roman wall painting, and Pompeian wall painting more specifically, helps to sketch a series of profound changes in visual and spatial design, which in turn signal changing societal demands with regard to cognitive perception. From the First to the Fourth Styles, a range of fundamentally different solutions emerged, to define the in-between of wall and room user ([Figure 13.1](#)): the First Style with its commitment to actual three-dimensionality, the Second Style with its appropriation of fictive space, and the Third and Fourth Styles with their attempts at generating immersive environments, intermingling reality and illusion, and turning the viewer into the agent supposed to homogenize the varied elements of the decoration.

Mapped onto the topology of the domestic context, Pompeian wall painting thus bears on our understanding of Roman culture and society well beyond the closer confines of the early imperial domestic context: it tells a story of the ways in which the Romans positioned themselves in the world(s) that surrounded them. In this sense, then, an exploration of this period and context of painting, looking at how it engages its viewers and negotiates reality and illusion, can also provide a viable means for the study of Roman painting more generally.

GUIDE FOR FURTHER READING

The *Pompei: Pitture e Mosaici (PPM)* volumes provide quintessential information for all Pompeian houses, including bibliographies and numerous illustrations; the volumes of the *Häuser in Pompeji* series offer exceptionally authoritative analyses, for example Strocka (1984), Allison and Sear (2004). For the House of Augustus: Iacopi (2008). For a comprehensive overview of the paintings in the Villa Farnesina: Mols and Moormann (2008) and also Leach (1982). For the Villa San Marco at Stabiae: Barbet and Miniero (1999); for the *Domus Aurea* (and the painter Famulus): Meyboom (1995).

Stewart (2004, 72–92) and Strocka (2007) give an accessible introduction to the four Pompeian styles; Descoeudres (1994) and Coarelli in Barbet (1985) offer a more critical

perspective. Ling (1991) is still the best survey of the formal development of Roman wall painting in English; for a more concise (and subversive) take, see Beard and Henderson (2001). Among the numerous general accounts of Roman wall-painting, Coarelli (2002), Panetta Ranieri (2004), Pappalardo and Mazzoleni (2004), Croisille (2005), Baldassare, Pontrandolfo, and Rouveret (2006), and Pappalardo (2009) provide useful sets of sample contexts with excellent illustrations. For a discussion of Vitruvius, *On Architecture* 7.5.1–2: Wesenberg (1975–76); Tybout (1989, 55–107); Elsner (1995, 50–62).

On the First Style, Laidlaw (1985) is still the definitive publication. On the Second Style, Beyen (1938/1960), Heinrich (2002), and, with a focus on architectural decorations, Tybout (1989) are central; Fittschen (1976) discusses the emergence of the Second Style; Grüner (2004) provides a discussion of the relationship of Republican wall painting to poetry and rhetoric. For the Third Style, Bastet and De Vos (1979) and Ehrhardt (1987) offer comprehensive discussions. For the Fourth Style: Croisille (1982); Strocka (1984); Archer (1990); Perrin (2002). For Roman painting after the destruction of the Campanian cities: Wirth (1934), Mielsch (1978), and Joyce (1981).

The social dimension of Roman wall painting is explained and extensively discussed in Leach (2004); Wallace-Hadrill (1994) and Allison (2004) offer important discussions of the relationship between wall decoration and room use/function. The chocolate box of social cultural engagement with Roman wall painting is rather varied. Good starting points are offered by Leach (1988), Clarke (1991), Bergmann (1994), Lorenz (2008) on visual narrative as structuring principle; Clarke (2001), Fredrick (1995) on eroticism/the gaze; Trimble (2002) on role behavior; Squire (forthcoming) on relationship text/image.

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CHAPTER 14

Mosaics

Roger Ling

The Beginnings

Mosaic—the practice of covering architectural surfaces with small pieces of colored stone, glass, or terracotta to create patterns or pictorial motifs—was one of the major artistic legacies of the Romans. They did not invent the medium—credit for this has to be given to the Greeks—but they brought it to maturity and realized its full potential.

The beginnings of mosaic must be traced back to a desire to provide durable but attractive floor coverings. The earliest examples, all in Greece and Asia Minor, are pavements of natural pebbles that, by the late fifth and fourth centuries BCE, came to include disciplined patterns and depictions of human figures and animals. As they were rendered in pebbles, the range of colors was restricted at first mainly to white and blue-black, and the size of the stones took little account of the shapes rendered, but gradually a greater variety of colors was introduced, with the addition of reds and yellows, and the pebbles became smaller, more tightly packed, and more carefully graded to achieve relatively convincing pictorial effects. The general rule was to concentrate figures in panels at the threshold or in the center of a room, where they were surrounded by decorative borders and plain stonework. The pavements of Pella in Macedonia (c. 300 BCE), which featured scenes from mythology and pairs of huntsmen converging on their quarry, represent the highpoint of this technique (Petsas 1965; Salzmann 1982; Dunbabin 1999, 5–17).

Perhaps because of the difficulty of obtaining natural pebbles of the requisite smallness and color range, Greek mosaicists of the third century BCE began to use pieces of cut stone. These “tesserae,” so called from the word for “dice” because they were generally cubic in form, rapidly supplanted pebbles and became the staple component of mosaic production throughout antiquity and the Middle Ages. The tight packing that could be accomplished, and the variety of colors that could be obtained, led to virtuoso performances in which the mosaicist sought to deceive the viewer into thinking that he or she was looking at a painting. In the finest examples, dated to the second and early first centuries BCE, the tesserae often measured only 1 or 2 millimeters across, and different colors were juxtaposed so as to replicate the modulations that painters produced by mixing pigments. Many of the figure compositions of the time were evidently copies of well-known paintings, such as the astonishing multifigure Alexander mosaic from the House of the Faun at Pompeii, which shows the climax of a battle between the Macedonians and the Persians in a field 2.70 meters high and 5.12 meters long (Andreae 1977; Cohen 1997).

Pavements in Roman Italy

The presence of the Alexander mosaic in Pompeii illustrates the spreading popularity of the new medium. Pictorial mosaics were primarily manufactured in the Greek world (including the Greek cities of Sicily), but Roman and Italian art enthusiasts began to acquire them in the same way that they collected Greek statues and panel paintings. As a consequence, many specimens were shipped to Italy, some perhaps specially produced for the western market, others actually cut from the pavements in which they had been set. Once in Italy, they were installed as *emblemata*, or “inserts,” within new pavements designed to receive them. Clear examples of imported panels are a pair of little scenes from theatrical productions discovered in the so-called Villa of Cicero outside Pompeii: each is signed by a craftsman from Samos in the eastern Aegean, and each is set in a shallow marble tray for ease of transport (Bieber and Rodenwaldt 1911; Dunbabin 1999, 44–47). And it was not only small panels: even the huge Alexander mosaic may have been brought from the east. It contains a number of small mistakes and anomalies that are best explained as the result of reassembling the pieces of a pavement that had originally been laid somewhere in the eastern Mediterranean, but was subsequently lifted and dismantled for the voyage to Italy.

However, the Italian taste for picture mosaics did not last. The idea of opening up the floor with “windows” into an illusionistic world parallel to the viewer’s own must always have seemed a little anomalous. At all events, first-century BCE Italy saw the triumph of pattern over picture. Various types of pattern were exploited. The earliest—evidently imported initially from the Punic settlements of North Africa—was a sparse design of lines of white or black tesserae forming geometric figures within a pavement of plain mortar or *opus signinum* (mortar with an aggregate of crushed terracotta). Another was a scattering of larger pieces of stone, often varied in color, against a background of continuous white or black tessellation. A third, and ultimately the most successful, consisted of black-and-white geometric patterns carried out entirely in tesserae. In each case the solidity of the floor was respected, and color schemes were more or less sober, so as not to distract from the polychromy of the accompanying wall paintings.

From now on, Italy and the surrounding areas evolved an independent tradition of mosaic paving (Blake 1930, 1936, 1940). Figures and other representational motifs were at first employed comparatively rarely, and, when they did occur, it was in a radically new form: the black silhouette. There are tentative early examples in the pavements of bath suites in Pompeii and Herculaneum, where marine fauna and figures of swimmers are shown on a continuous white background, together with floral ornaments or geometric motifs. Gradually this “black-figure” style became more widespread and was used in more ambitious compositions. It reached its apogee in the second and early third centuries CE, when it was the dominant form of figure decoration in the well-preserved series of pavements in Rome’s port city of Ostia (Becatti 1961; Clarke 1979).

Within the black-figure style, marine fauna, sometimes associated with the sea god Neptune driving a chariot drawn by mythical sea beasts, remained a popular and characteristic theme, partly because of its adaptability ([Figure 14.1](#)). The white background formed a neutral, impenetrable surface that respected the architectural function of the floor; but it could also be seen as the water in which the dolphins, fish, crustaceans, and sea monsters were swimming.

At the same time, it gave mosaicists the opportunity to vary the orientation of the creatures to reflect the changing position of the viewer within the room. In some cases, less satisfactorily, the white ground was provided with zigzag lines to suggest the choppy surface of the sea, thus imposing a literal reading and a specificity of orientation that destroyed the fine ambiguity of the best examples. Yet always the solid blackness of the figures, broken only by internal white lines suggesting the folds and musculature of their bodies, negates any true effect of depth. It introduces an element of unreality that makes it possible for us to accept the absurdity of a water-world beneath our feet.



Figure 14.1 Black-and-white marine mosaic. Baths of Buticosis, Ostia. c. 115 CE.

Photo: R.J. Ling 96/35.

Alongside the “black-figure” pavements, Italian mosaicists developed a floral style rendered in the same black silhouette. The best specimens come from the Rome area and date to the second century CE; they include a fine series from the Hospitalia of Hadrian’s villa at Tivoli, where recesses for the guests’ couches were paved with simple geometric patterns but the central parts of the rooms carried elegant designs of arabesques and rosettes ([Figure 14.2](#)). However, it was the purely geometric pavements, with patterns compounded of squares, lozenges, polygons, roundels, almond shapes, meanders, and all sorts of other shapes, that predominated in Italy, as they did in most parts of the Roman world.



Figure 14.2 Black-and-white floral mosaic. Hadrian's Villa at Tivoli, Hospitalia. c. 120 CE.

Photo: R.J. Ling 98/10.

Pavements in the Eastern Provinces

While the mosaics of Italy developed in new directions, those of the eastern Mediterranean, embracing an area corresponding to the eastern part of modern Turkey, Cyprus, and the Levant, remained true to the pictorial tradition of Hellenistic times. The old formula of the central figure scene rendered to look like a painting, with figures modeled by shading and foreshortening within realistic spatial settings, and enclosed by borders of geometric patterns or leaf scrolls that threw it into greater prominence, remained in the ascendant. The chief differences were that the figure scenes tended to become larger, and sometimes to be multiplied, while the framing area was reduced in importance. Numerous examples of this style were found in the 1920s and 1930s in excavations conducted at Antioch, capital of the Roman province of Syria (Levi 1947; Campbell 1988).

One characteristic feature of the eastern figure mosaics was the increasing use of personifications. These included not only standard types found all over the Empire, such as the four seasons and the months of the year, but also geographical features such as rivers and—comparatively rare in the West—abstract concepts such as Ananeosis (Renewal), Apolausis (Enjoyment), and Soteria (Safety). Symptomatic of the increasing intellectualism of the

imperial age, and perhaps testifying to a particular preoccupation of eastern patrons with philosophical speculation, these personified ideas were most frequently represented in the form of isolated busts; but sometimes, especially from the third century onwards, they were put together in allegorical figure compositions of considerable complexity.

The abstract ideas, and indeed many of the geographical personifications too, were so obscure as to necessitate that figures were labeled. Labels became increasingly common in eastern mosaics (as indeed in eastern wall paintings) from the third century CE onwards. They inaugurated a fashion that spread also to representations of standard Greek myths. Since many of these subjects had hitherto been depicted without labels, and since it usually remained possible for the narrative to be identified from visual clues within the scenes, we must assume that the practice of labeling was largely conventional (Ling 1998, 55–57).

In regard to ornament, a major innovation in eastern mosaics was the so-called rainbow style. This rejected traditional mosaic techniques, which had constructed motifs in linear terms, using rows of tesserae to define the contours, then filling the interior with further parallel rows. Instead, it substituted a method of laying tesserae point to point, with colors changing in diagonal sequence, so as to produce a kaleidoscopic effect that exploited rather than concealed the tessera technique. The new method was applied in various decorative forms. A favorite was the “rainbow cable,” in which colors were graded to produce the appearance of a convex band, which was then used to frame individual panels or to build up whole decorative schemes. More popular still were areas infilled with continuous patterns (zigzags, tilted squares, or simple oblique lines) rendered in tesserae set point to point, again in graded tones. Such patterns produced a dazzling display of color and texture suggestive of woven rugs. Ultimately, their popularity spread also to Africa ([Figure 14.3](#)) and the west.

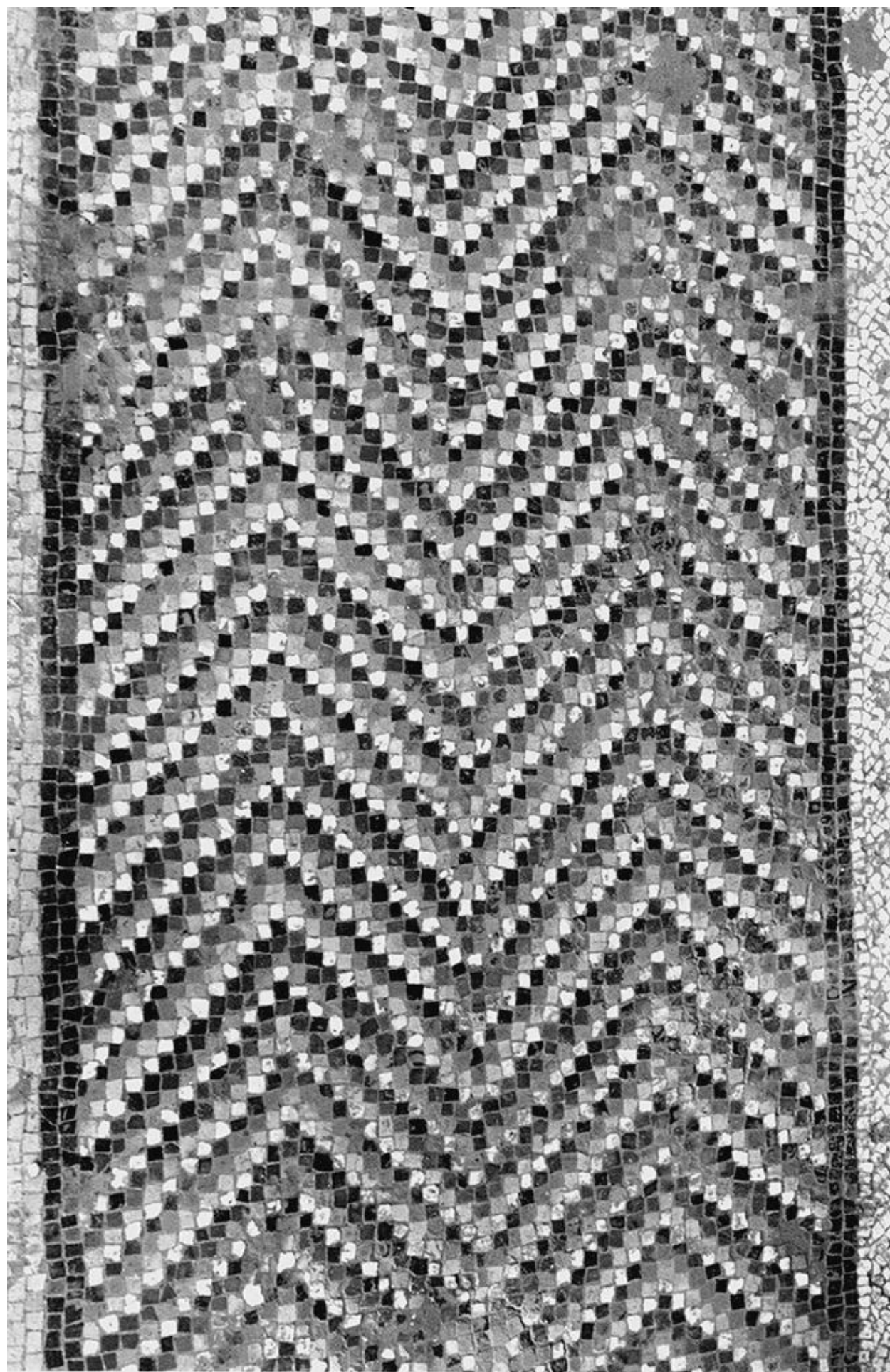


Figure 14.3 “Rainbow mat” in House of the Hunt, Bulla Regia (Tunisia).

Photo: R.J. Ling 107/28.

Pavements in Roman Africa

In Roman Africa, the area extending from modern Tripolitania through Tunisia and Algeria to Morocco, mosaic arrived late. The first known examples of complete tessellated pavements are no earlier than the late first century CE. At this stage the vogue was for black-and-white geometric pavements whose patterns were closely related to examples in Italy; but African mosaicists quickly rejected the black-and-white style of Italy in favor of polychromy. The reasons for this choice are unclear, but one factor may have been the geological resources of northern and eastern Tunisia, where the African tradition first developed. The availability of colored stone such as the richly variegated red, pink, and yellow marble (*giallo antico*) from the quarries of Chemtou may have inspired artists to experiment with a coloristic treatment that then became widely fashionable.

There were many geometric and other patterns that were peculiar to Africa, such as a polychrome version of the Italian “floral style” and a system of arching “cables” containing peacock feathers; striking, too, are a number of free-growing vegetal decorations in which vines or the like emerge from leaf calyces or wine bowls at the corners of a pavement and spread in sinuous curves toward the center. However, Africa is noted above all for its figure mosaics, with scenes distributed freely over the floor surface (Dunbabin 1978 and 1999, 101–129). These favored a neutral white ground, like the contemporary compositions of Italy, but unlike Italian work they were invariably carried out in color. And, though they frequently featured mythological themes—some of them not attested elsewhere in the Empire—the most popular subjects were chosen from everyday life.

Preeminent were the entertainments of the amphitheater and the race track, the hunting expeditions that were a favorite activity of the local aristocracy, and the maintenance of the stud farms and agricultural estates that were the source of their wealth.

Representations connected with the amphitheater (Dunbabin 1978, 65–87; for Italian examples cf. Newby, [Chapter 27](#), this volume) fall into three main groups: those that illustrate the actual events of a show or shows that took place there, those that commemorate a show by cataloguing the animals that were exhibited in it, and those that refer to the games indirectly by means of the emblems of the different “clubs” of *venatores* (hunters), the toreadors of the ancient arena. To the first category belongs a particularly interesting mosaic from a villa at Smirat, not far from El Djem in Tunisia, which shows duels between *venatores* and leopards ([Figure 14.4](#)). All the *venatores* and animals are named, as is a prominent standing figure, Magerius, no doubt the owner of the villa, whose generous gift toward the funding of the games is recorded in a lengthy inscription. Of the second category the most notable examples are from the Carthage region: in each case animals are distributed at different levels within a plain white field, and in one case numbers were written against them, apparently to record the quantities of the relevant species exhibited (Dunbabin 1978, 71–74, pls. 57–58). To the third

category belongs a mosaic panel at El Djem, the so-called Mosaic of the Bulls and the Banquet, which depicts five banqueters enjoying themselves round a semi-circular table while two attendants exhort them not to disturb the bulls, which are shown sleeping in the foreground (Dunbabin 1978, 78–79, pl. 69). The five banqueters all have different attributes, which, with the aid of representations in other mosaics, have been identified as the emblems of five different clubs or teams: an ivy leaf; a crown with three spikes, one of which bears the letter S; a crown with five radiating spikes, one of which carries a fish; a stalk of a plant identified as millet; and a bull goad in the form of a crescent on a stick. It seems that members of the rival teams are drinking together on the eve of a show, and that the bulls below are the animals against which they are to be pitted the next day.



Figure 14.4 Mosaic with amphitheater scenes from Smirat (Tunisia). Mid-second century CE. Sousse Museum.

Photo: R.J. Ling 103/27.

The second popular entertainment to be represented was the chariot racing of the circus (Dunbabin 1978, 88–108). Some mosaics focused on a single victorious charioteer and his team of horses. Others showed the race in progress. Of the latter only five more or less complete examples survive, and two are parodies that substitute birds (geese, parrots, and peacocks are preserved) for the chariot horses; but there is little doubt that they represent a well-established form of circus illustration evolved in Africa that inspired later imitations in

other provinces, notably Spain. Unlike the mosaics that depicted events in the amphitheater, this type showed not only the action, but also the building that contained it. There were inevitably some inconsistencies of perspective, as illustrated by the earliest version, one of those from Carthage (Dunbabin 1978, 89, pl. 77). While the interior of the circus is laid out in bird's-eye view, the actual structures—including the external façade at the bottom, the central *spina* round which the chariots turned, and the far side of the auditorium, surmounted by two buildings—are all shown in normal horizontal perspective, as are the chariots involved in the race, two of them above the *spina* and two below.

Scenes of hunting and of rural life involve figures and animals in outdoor settings, and all adopt a free-field composition in which episodes are arranged freely over the whole pavement (Dunbabin 1978, 46–64, 109–123). The background is always white, and landscape elements, like the figures, are set at different levels with isolated ground lines; there is thus no unified space such as might cause an unsettling visual penetration of the surface. At the same time, the presence of landscape (trees, bushes, distant hills, buildings) tends to impose a single orientation. A typical arrangement is in two or three registers with a continuous terrain at the bottom and a line of hills, trees, or buildings rounding off the composition at the top. The subject matter is essentially realistic, even where some iconographic types are borrowed from the traditional repertoire. A good example of the hunting series is an apsidal mosaic of a boar hunt from Carthage in which huntsmen and dogs confront the boar in the lowest register, drive it into a netted enclosure in the middle, and carry home its carcass suspended from a pole at the top. These are the events of a real boar hunt described in narrative sequence.

That such hunt scenes were rooted in the real life of African landowners is clearly indicated where the action takes place on or near a country estate. This is achieved most characteristically by including a representation, in a prominent position, of a farm or villa. A famous example is the mosaic of Dominus Julius from Carthage, which shows a manor house at the center, with the lord and lady receiving gifts of farm produce above and below ([Figure 21.6](#); Dunbabin 1978, 119–121, pl. 109; Muth, [Chapter 21](#), this volume). The style of the building, with its high substructure and corner towers, apparently reflects the reality of villa architecture in the fourth century. A similar building is one of three depicted in the semi-circular mosaics from a three-apsed room in a house at Tabarka (ancient Thabraca) in Tunisia (Dunbabin 1978, 122–123, pls. 111–113). Like the Dominus Julius mosaic ([Figure 21.6](#)), these may record specific details of the country estate of the mosaicist's client. Other mosaics depict stud farms. In an example from the House of Sorothus at Sousse, we see mares and foals grazing against a rocky landscape, while at each corner there is a medallion containing a pair of named horses confronted across a palm tree; the horses are branded with the name of Sorothus, who is thus identified as their owner (Dunbabin 1978, 93–94, 113–114, pls. 81–82).

In the late third and fourth centuries there was an increasing taste for exotic hunts, in which the prey was not everyday game such as boars, hares, or deer, but tropical creatures of the kind that were collected for shows in the amphitheater. The hunts are still represented by means of multilevel compositions, and the details continue to ring true: a baited box is used to trap a lioness in a mosaic from the Dermech area of Carthage (Dunbabin 1978, 53–55, pls. 26–28), and various wild beasts are corralled within netting in a scene from the House of Isguntus at

Hippo Regius (Bône in Algeria; Dunbabin 1978, 55, pl. 29). However, these scenes cannot now represent the normal activities of local aristocrats; they have become subsumed within a grander theme: big-game hunts in the African interior.

The general African predilection for subjects taken from the real world rather than from mythology, and the form of representation that distributes scenes rendered in full color over a broad, undifferentiated white surface, are distinctive features that have given rise to the term “African style.” This African style ultimately spread beyond the shores of Africa and came to exercise some influence in other parts of the Empire.

The area where this influence was most directly felt was, not surprisingly, the nearby island of Sicily. Here, a number of mosaics laid in the fourth century show such close similarities to pavements in Africa that it seems almost certain that they were the work of African mosaicists brought over to carry out special commissions. The most striking examples are in the fabulous villa at Piazza Armerina, probably dated to the third quarter of the century, where pavement after pavement, whether mythological or “documentary,” can be paralleled in Africa (Carandini, Ricci, and De Vos 1982; Wilson 1983; Dunbabin 1999, 130–143; on Piazza Armerina see Muth, [Chapter 21](#), this volume, [Figures 21.2, 21.4–21.5](#)). Most impressive of all are the two hunt mosaics: the Small Hunt, which depicts the standard hunting of hares, boar, deer, and birds, and the 70-meter-long Great Hunt, which shows the collection and transport of exotic beasts for the amphitheater. Both are laid out in the African manner with independent colored scenes distributed at different levels on a white ground, and both include numerous details that directly reflect African prototypes.

Pavements in the Northern and Western Provinces

The northern and western provinces (Gaul, Germany, Britain, Spain, and the provinces of the Alps and the Danube frontier), like Africa, had had no native tradition of mosaic production before they became part of the Empire. Apart from some isolated instances of the Punic-Italian tradition of pavements of tessera patterns set in *opus signinum*, concentrated mainly along the Mediterranean coasts of Spain and Gaul, there were few decorated pavements before the first century CE. When true mosaics appeared, they were, not surprisingly, inspired by Italian models rather than eastern ones. Numerous sites provide examples of black-and-white geometric pavements like those that prevailed in Roman Italy in the early imperial period. At Ampurias in Catalonia, the excavated houses of the Roman quarter have yielded a fine range of mosaics in this style, including grids of octagons, four-point stars, and hexagons, lozenges and swastikas, and eight-lozenge stars enclosing squares (Ling 1998, 61–62; Dunbabin 1999, 144–145).

Geometric mosaics continued to be laid in the northern and western provinces during the second century, but the austere versions of the first century began to give way to more complex schemes, often with the addition of color (principally red and yellow), or else reversing the traditional black on white to obtain white on black; that is, a pattern “in negative.” Italian models were now left behind, and the regions acquired greater artistic independence. A

particularly vigorous school of mosaic workers was active in the Rhône valley and central Gaul: one of their specialties was the style of “multiple patterns,” where the floor was divided into large square panels, each of which was filled with a different pattern, such as latchkey meander, lozenge stars and squares, perspectival cubes, intersecting circles, four-point stars, or roundels containing various motifs (Stern 1965; Lancha 1977 and 1981).

As for figure work, the free-field black silhouette figure compositions that dominated the pavements of Rome and Ostia in the second and third centuries never acquired great currency in the north and west (except occasionally in the highly Romanized cities of southern Spain, such as Córdoba, Mérida, and Itálica, all of which had a strong admixture of settlers of Italian stock). Instead, such figures as did appear were strictly subordinate to the geometric framework and were depicted in more or less realistic colors.

The typical pavements of the northern and western provinces from the second to the fourth centuries depend on a more or less even structure of geometric ornament covering the surface. Divisions are effected, almost without exception, by various forms of plait pattern or “guilloche,” each strand of which is built up in graded colors changing across five lines of tesserae. The fields so created can be framed by further inner borders, either monochrome or polychrome, and they are usually filled with abstract ornaments or floral motifs of more or less complex form. The background is almost invariably a neutral white. Where figures (human or animal) or figure scenes occur, they are spread evenly through the scheme, each subject placed in a separate panel. Even if there is a principal scene at the center, this never dominates the pavement in the way that the Greek-style *emblema* did, because the other figure panels are sufficiently important to draw attention away from it. Moreover, since the figures are shown on a neutral white ground that negates any effect of spatial recession, the old conflict between the illusionism of polychrome figure scenes and the architectural function of the floor surface is largely avoided. Some of these pavements become extraordinarily ornate in their decorative detail: among the finest are a mosaic with Dionysiac figures in Cologne ([Figure 25.13](#); Parlasca 1959, 75–79, pls. 66–79; cf. Wilson, [Chapter 25](#), this volume) and one with gladiatorial combats from Nennig in the Mosel valley (Parlasca 1959, 35–38, pls. 36–39).

Mosaics in Context

It is all too easy to forget, given that most mosaics are now seen either as museum exhibits or within the remains of buildings preserved barely above ground level, that they originally decorated architectural interiors. As such, we need to think of them in terms of the size and functions of the rooms that they embellished; we need to reimagine the wall and ceiling paintings, the hangings, and the furniture that accompanied them; we need to relate them to the doorways that gave access to them and the windows that illuminated them. A few observations must suffice.

Mosaics—or at least, mosaic pavements—were designed to be walked on. Whereas now we see them mainly on museum walls or roped off in museum floors, and even when they remain in position in archaeological sites we are often forced to regard them from a distance, looking

over the truncated remnants of the walls that enclosed them, the ancient viewer would have interacted with them directly. He or she would have moved around the room, appreciating them from different angles, but almost always from above and from within the margins rather than from the outside. Moreover, certain viewpoints would have been prioritized (or restricted) by the position of furniture and by patterns of room use.

This condition makes for problems of orientation. The ubiquitous geometric and floral patterns were relatively easy to manage because they imposed no specific viewpoint. They were particularly suited to corridors and other spaces of transition, through which people were encouraged to pass without lingering: they led the eye forward and allowed no distractions. However, figures or figure scenes naturally dictated a favored viewpoint, and it was necessary to take this into account. For this reason, any dominant figure subject tended to be reserved for rooms where people lingered, such as dining rooms or bedrooms. Starting with the *emblema* mosaics of Hellenistic times, there was a long tradition, especially in the east, of illusionistic scenes set in the middle of a pavement and oriented for viewing from the margins of a room, whether from the entrance or from the couches of the diners or the couches of repose within a *cubiculum*. But the mosaicists of Italy and the west evidently became frustrated with the constraints of the single-view pavement. Even in dining rooms there was a conflict of interest: Should the figure scene face the diners as they entered a room or should it be available for contemplation from the rear of the room during dinner? The solution was to disperse a number of figures or figure scenes across a pavement within equally weighted fields, and to change the orientation to suit the varied positions of viewers; thus, figures toward the margins tended to be oriented for viewers in the middle of the room, those at the middle toward viewers at the margins. To avoid too emphatic an orientation, these figures would be set in neutral white fields rather than within an illusionistic spatial setting. Sometimes, especially in Italy and Africa, the figures were dispersed against a continuous white background, changing their orientation according to their place in the room. This effect was particularly successful in the marine compositions of bath buildings, where the white background came to represent the water in which the sea creatures floated and the use of black silhouette enhanced the effect of a conventional surface decoration.

The relationship between a floor decoration and the furniture installed within a room (couches, tables, chairs, cupboards, and so on) is one that poses interesting questions. We tend to assume that the decoration was meant to be seen, and in some cases there was a clear differentiation between areas that would be obscured by furniture and those that would be left visible. Good specimens are the Second-Style *cubicula* of late Republican Italy, where plain or simply decorated spaces, often within alcoves, accommodated the beds, while a more ornate treatment, sometimes focusing on an illusionistic picture, was accorded to the forepart of the chamber ([Figure 14.2](#)). More obvious markers are the U-shaped spaces that accommodated the dining couches of a *triclinium* (cf. [Figures 19.8](#) and [21.1](#)), especially where the side areas were of unequal length, reflecting the way in which the sequence of couches overlapped from right to left. Yet what of those pavements where the decoration spread with equal emphasis over the whole of the available space? Clearly, in some rooms such as those in baths, the interior was largely devoid of furniture and the users could circulate freely, seeing the panoply

of pictures that unfolded beneath their feet. In other cases, however, parts of the decoration must have been obscured when furniture was in position. Strange as it may seem to us, the diners in a *triclinium* would not necessarily have seen the mosaic pavement to best advantage. Indeed, depending on the positioning of tables, they may not have seen much of it at all. The explanation is, presumably, that furniture was not permanently installed but could be moved from room to room as required; there would have been many occasions when the mosaic lay uncovered and available for inspection.

As the decoration of pavements sometimes (but not always) took account of the position of furniture, so too was it accommodated to the decoration of walls and ceilings. During the time of the so-called First Pompeian Style, illusionistic *emblemata*, sometimes of extraordinary elaboration (such as the Alexander mosaic), placed pictorial emphasis firmly on the floor. In compensation, there was very little figure painting on the walls, where the decorative schemes were based on colored blockwork in shallow relief; such schemes, inspired by ashlar masonry or by marble veneers that themselves imitated masonry, allowed space at most for a narrow frieze of figures or vegetal elements at eye level (Lorenz, [Chapter 13](#), this volume, Figures 13.1.1, [13.2](#)). The ceilings that accompanied these pseudo-structural wall decorations, so far as we can judge from surviving evidence, took the form of wooden panels and coffers, or plaster copies of them.

When the First Style gave way to the Second Style, wall paintings became more elaborate, incorporating illusions of receding architecture rendered in full polychromy and ultimately admitting large-scale figures and figure scenes (Lorenz, Chapter 13, this volume, Figure 13.1.2); by contrast, pavements became simpler, with abstract patterns, especially black-and-white geometric patterns, dominating the repertoire. Ceilings, now increasingly vaulted, tended to favor coffer schemes in white stucco relief, which provided a perfect foil to the polychromy of the walls.

This color balance remained the general rule during the early Empire, except that ceiling decorations tended to become richer and to pick up the coloring of the walls. Mosaic pavements, at least in Italy, were predominantly monochrome, so as not to distract too much from the red, yellow, and purple of wall paintings. Only in the east, and increasingly in Africa and the western provinces, did colored mosaics, often containing multiple figures, appear in combination with polychrome wall and ceiling decorations. The effect must have been overpowering; modern taste would have found it scarcely tolerable.

There were also more direct relationships between mosaic and the other media of interior decoration. Some of the earliest geometric patterns found in pavements of the first century BCE were inspired by the coffering of wooden and stucco ceilings; then, during the first century CE, the influence began to travel the other way, with some painted ceilings adopting patterns that had been pioneered on the floor (Barbet 1983). In later times, a number of mosaic pavements seem to have presented themselves as deliberate “reflections” of centralized ceiling decorations. Such is the central part of a pavement in the House of the Boat of Psyche at Antioch, where a picture of a mythological scene is framed by an imitation cornice “supported” by brackets, giving the impression that the viewer is looking up at a recessed

ceiling panel rather than down at the floor (Levi 1947, 167–172, pl. 35). Similar are a number of pavements containing large roundels that seem to be “carried” by snake-legged giants or fish-tailed Tritons set in the spandrels; the effect here is of a dome supported by figures carved or painted on the pendentives (e.g., Parlasca 1959, 55–56, pl. 53; Neal and Cosh 2002, 152–153, figs. 112, 114, 116).

The paradox of taking motifs characteristic of ceiling decorations and reproducing them on the ground beneath one’s feet clearly responded to a playful streak in the mentality of Roman-age patrons. Even more capricious are some of the links between mosaic pavements and painted walls. At Antioch, where the tradition of having illusionistic pictures opening like windows in the floor was preserved from the Hellenistic age, there are examples where the pictures in question were set in columnar pavilions such as would normally have been used as picture frames in wall paintings (Levi 1947, 142–149, 156–159, pls. 27, 30). The result is to emphasize the absurdity of transferring pictures intended for the vertical dimension to the horizontal. Even more absurd, in a different way, is the reproduction of the patterns of mosaic pavements on the wall. There are one or two examples in the western provinces of mosaic guilloche, including the individual tesserae, being replicated by wall painters (e.g., Davey and Ling 1982, 50, 158–159, figs. 2, 36, pl. 72). The imitation mosaic may have been confined to the base of the wall (we do not know, because our information comes from broken fragments of plaster) and have been intended to suggest the continuation of a real mosaic pavement that turned up the wall, something that occasionally happened in reality; but the notion of using the pictorial medium to imitate the appearance of tiny cubes of stone set edge to edge seems a total perversion of the original relationship between painting and mosaic.

Where mosaics were set on walls and vaults, the relationships are more logical. Some mosaic wall decorations of the first century CE found on the Palatine and Esquiline hills in Rome are closely indebted to the painted schemes of the Fourth Style, save that there is a greater use of blue for backgrounds (e.g., De Vos 1997). Much of the evidence of wall and vault mosaics in imperial bath buildings has not survived, but what we have suggests that colored backgrounds, and especially those of blue and golden yellow, remained more typical of the medium. By contrast, the mosaic vault surviving in the annular corridor around the mausoleum of Constantine’s daughter Constantia (now the church of Santa Costanza in Rome) is much more akin to mosaic pavements, both in its use of white backgrounds and in its choice of patterns and motifs, including sprawling vine tendrils and scattered branches and birds, such as are frequently encountered in the pavements of Africa (Stern 1958). Here, for once, the normal rule is flouted: the vocabulary of the floor is whimsically transferred to the ceiling.

A much-debated issue concerns reasons for the choices of subject matter in mosaics. Why did patrons select certain figures and motifs rather than others? Why were certain figures and motifs combined in one pavement? Did the selections have any relevance to the function of the space that they decorated?

By far the most popular subjects, as in contemporary wall paintings, were the stories and protagonists of Greek myths. By contrast, the legends of Rome were extremely rare: episodes from the story of Dido and Aeneas—as at Low Ham, Somerset, Britain (Cosh and Neal 2005,

253–257)—and little else. After Greek myths, the most popular subjects were those of everyday life, such as the scenes of rural activities and popular entertainments that were especially favored in Africa ([Figure 14.4](#)). Rather more esoteric, and particularly associated with Antioch and other centers of Syria and the Levant, were episodes from novels and elaborate allegories featuring personifications of abstract ideas—subjects so obscure that it was often necessary to provide labels to identify the figures.

Clearly, the reasons for choosing subjects were many and varied, but a powerful factor would have been their capacity to appeal to the educated taste of patrons, who would have been reminded of episodes in literature, philosophical speculations, or well-remembered sporting events. Where figured mosaics were displayed in rooms to which guests were admitted, especially dining and reception rooms, there must also have been an element of cultural exchange: the patron would have demonstrated that he “belonged to the club,” the visitors would have admired their host’s taste and erudition, and the assembled party might have discussed the references evoked. It is not surprising that it was precisely in the rooms that would have been used for entertainment that we generally find the most ambitious and pretentious themes.

However, what of the relation between subject and function? Here the most obvious conjunction is seen in baths. Whether in public or private bath buildings, the predominant themes of mosaic pavements are related to water and to the physical exercise that was an essential concomitant of bathing. Time and again we see compositions of marine fauna and the deities of the deep (giant heads of Oceanus, [Figure 14.5](#), or Neptune and Amphitrite in their triumphal carriage), or arrays of wrestlers and boxers preparing for the contest. Elsewhere, correspondences are less consistently applied. In dining rooms and other reception spaces, we often encounter wine vessels or hunting scenes that probably refer to the drink and game served at the banquet (or flaunt the host’s prowess as a huntsman); and in one case, the House of the Buffet Supper at Antioch, there is a more specific reference to dining: the courses of a meal, including boiled eggs, pigs’ trotters, artichokes, fish, and a leg of ham, are laid out on a horseshoe-shaped table reflecting the position of the actual diners in an apsidal room (Levi 1947, 132–136, pls. 23a, 24). Depictions of Dionysus and his retinue were also popular, perhaps because of the link with wine; but there is also widespread use of general scenes from mythology, especially the heroic myths, which would have inspired the predominantly male participants in the feast. Other subjects, as already noted, were designed simply to respond to the literary or philosophical interests of the diners.



Figure 14.5 Head of Oceanus from Baths at Themetra (Tunisia). Sousse Museum.

Photo: R.J. Ling 103/2.

In the more intimate spaces of bedrooms and rest rooms there was a greater emphasis on romantic myths, such as the tales of lovers related in the poetry of Ovid; and sometimes we

find more explicit references to love-making: the embrace of a satyr and a maenad, for example, may stand for that of a human couple who inhabited the same space. Similarly, representations of Venus, goddess of love and beauty, were particularly appropriate to the bedroom and the boudoir.

However, such coincidences of subject and function are never exclusive. There are many instances where Venus and mythical love stories appear in the pavements of dining rooms, or heroic themes are found in bedrooms. We even find subjects in the floors of bathrooms that might have seemed more suited to other kinds of rooms: a case in point is the pavement in the villa at Low Ham, which tells the story of Dido and Aeneas in a form that reflects Virgil's account. There were clearly no hard-and-fast rules for the ways in which particular spaces were decorated.

Wall and Vault Mosaics

Wall and vault mosaics, mentioned in passing earlier, have no Greek predecessors. They are an original contribution of the Roman age (Sear 1977). Their origins can be traced back to the imitation grottos, often containing water sources, which came to be an important feature of Roman Republican villas and gardens. These artificial *nymphaea*, named after the water nymphs who presided over springs, were encrusted with pumice, marine concretions, and varieties of seashells to enhance their rustic character; and gradually, as the grottos took on a more regular architectural shape, their decorations became more formal and made use of a greater variety of materials: marble chippings, pellets of blue frit ("Egyptian blue," a pigment produced by baking a mixture of copper, soda, and sand), broken pieces of glass, and ultimately tesserae of both stone and glass. By the beginning of the first century CE this specialized form of mosaic, very different from that of contemporary pavements, had become an established mode of decoration for the walls and vaults of *nymphaea* and similar subterranean rooms.

Among the earliest surviving examples of the new art form are a series of garden fountains built by the householders of Pompeii and Herculaneum in the last years of life in the cities. These structures, which take the form of a pavilion set against a wall with a niche from which the water flowed, carry decorations that well illustrate the colorism and the new repertory of motifs introduced into wall mosaics during the first century CE ([Figure 14.6](#)). While the lower parts of the walls are coated with pumice (or plates of white marble), and all architectural divisions, as well as the main panel frames, are defined by rows of shells, the rest of the decoration is executed entirely in tesserae. Unlike the tesserae of contemporary floor mosaics, these are predominantly of glass, which permits the production of bright colors, especially dark blues and greens, but also reds and yellows of a richer hue than can be obtained in stone and terracotta. The polychromy emphasizes the affinity of wall mosaics to wall painting, and many of the motifs that are used—palmettes, candelabra, umbrella canopies, stencil-like borders, and figure subjects such as Venus reclining in a shell, swans, dolphins, and Cupids—are those of contemporary murals.



Figure 14.6 Wall mosaic with animal scenes. House of Neptune and Amphitrite, Herculaneum. Third quarter of first century CE.

Photo: R.J. Ling 6/34.

It would be wrong, however, to regard wall (and vault) mosaic simply as a more durable substitute for painting. Admittedly, durability must have been one consideration in damp and steamy surroundings such as obtained in fountains and baths, where painted plaster would soon have become mildewed and lost its color. However, more important were the positive aspects of mosaic. The colors provided by glass tesserae were not only unaffected by damp, but also much more vivid than those available in the fresco technique; the surface could be regularly wiped clean without suffering harm; and the reflective qualities of the glass would have been particularly attractive in the context of bright light and water. Since the tesserae were not polished smooth as they were in floor mosaics, the myriad varying inclinations of the surface would have created a scintillating effect that no wall painting could rival. The new medium thus acquired its own aesthetic.

Recent discoveries of large-scale mosaic wall decorations in one or two houses in Rome (see earlier) reveal how ambitious some compositions in wall mosaic had become by the second half of the first century CE; and there is tantalizing evidence, both literary and archaeological, for the use of mosaics on the lofty vaults of public baths during the imperial age. Unfortunately, the vulnerability of walls and vaults means that, after the destruction of Pompeii, very little

remains apart from loose glass tesserae or, where structures are still standing, imprints of tesserae in the plaster. It is not until the late third century that we have a half complete vault decoration, and this is a small-scale specimen in a tomb. The mausoleum of the Julii (Tomb M) in the necropolis under the later basilica of St Peter's in Rome has a depiction of the sun god riding his chariot, surrounded by vine tendrils, on a yellow ground that anticipates the luminous gold vaults of the Byzantine period (Sear 1977, 127–128, pl. 53, 2–3; Dunbabin 1999, 249–250, fig. 265).

This little vault mosaic in the Vatican makes a fitting point to conclude a survey of Roman mosaics. While the subject of the solar charioteer is ostensibly pagan, the accompanying scenes on the upper parts of the walls, which include a representation of the Good Shepherd and the story of Jonah and the whale, show that the sun god is here assimilated to Christ in triumph. It is thus the earliest known Christian mosaic, and points the way forward to the great series of Byzantine wall and vault mosaics, preserved in the churches of Rome, Ravenna, and Constantinople, which were destined to become the glory of the mosaic worker's craft from the late fourth century onwards. Resplendent with gold and dark blue backgrounds, these soaring decorations carried the mosaic tradition through to the late Middle Ages and beyond. Because the buildings in question have been maintained and restored to the present day, their mosaics have been miraculously preserved. They form a direct and tangible link with the early flowering of the art form in Roman times.

Epilogue: What Next?

It is now recognized that, in bringing floor mosaic to maturity and in creating the art of wall and vault mosaic, the Romans made a major contribution to the art of the western world. Despite this, the study of Roman mosaics is still in its infancy. It is only in the last half-century that significant progress has been made. The emergence of AIEMA (Association Internationale pour l'Étude de la Mosaïque Antique) as a forum for the exchange of ideas has played a crucial role; its regular colloquia and bibliographical bulletin have become the standard vehicles for disseminating information on new discoveries and research. At the same time, the publication of corpora of mosaics for various countries, notably France, Tunisia, and Spain—and more recently Britain—have made increasing quantities of the basic data available for study.

One may ask: What lies ahead? One crucial desideratum is more closely dated material. Mosaics are notoriously difficult to date; even if datable items such as coins or potsherds are sealed beneath a pavement, this provides only a *terminus post quem*; and, in the case of coins at least, a very elastic *terminus*. Yet there is reason to believe that some deposits of coins under mosaics were deliberately planted as “foundation deposits,” and more careful examinations of the mortar bedding of mosaics—something that only happens where mosaics are lifted—should help to add to the stock of dated examples and thus refine our understanding of the chronology. A similar role may be played by materials used in mosaics. The use of datable pottery, especially samian ware, to manufacture tesserae offers the prospect of finer tuning. At the moment, the only province where this practice has been observed is Britain, but

more intensive inspection of pavements in other regions may yield further instances.

The application of scientific techniques to source the materials used in mosaics is a further field for future research. By establishing the provenance of the minerals employed in pavements, geologists can see which came from close at hand, and which had to be brought from further afield, thus improving our understanding of the organization and economic basis of the mosaic industry. Recent studies (e.g., Schmid 1993, 169–179; Flügel and Flügel 1997; Allen and Fulford 2004; Wilkinson et al. 2008; Tasker et al. 2011; White et al. 2012) have shown the potential of this research and further progress can be expected.

Much remains to be done in more traditional fields, such as the study of motifs and patterns that may indicate mosaics that were produced by the same craftsmen, or at least were influenced by one another; and there is scope for more work on the role of mosaics in delineating the function of spaces within houses, and as indicators on the culture and aspirations of patrons. In short, the study of Roman mosaics is a fertile field, and we can look forward to many advances in our knowledge during the years to come.

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

There are several well-illustrated surveys of the art of mosaic across the ages from antiquity to the present day, each with an early chapter or chapters on the ancient world, but the standard work on ancient mosaics is now the comprehensive and authoritative volume by K.M.D. Dunbabin (1999). A briefer and more popular account is that of R. Ling (1998). For wall and vault mosaics, F.B. Sear (1977) provides a descriptive catalogue with a brief introduction. On the techniques employed in executing mosaics, there are useful essays by Sear (wall and vault mosaics: 1976) and D.S. Neal (floor mosaics: 1976), but Neal's view that Roman mosaicists had already invented the modern "indirect" or "reverse" method, in which the tesserae are stuck face down on a cartoon drawn on strong paper or cloth before being turned over and set on the floor or wall, is highly questionable (see Ling 1994). On early pebble mosaics, see the monograph by D. Salzmann (1982), and more generally on Greek mosaics two articles by C.M. Robertson (1965, 1967). For the different regions of the Roman world there are both multivolume corpora and single monographs. Exemplary are the volumes of France's *Receuil* (1957–) and the Tunisian *Corpus* (1973–); more superficial is the Spanish *Corpus* (1978–). A recent addition, exceptionally lavish in its color illustrations, is the four-volume set covering Britain (Neal and Cosh 2002 and 2009; Cosh and Neal 2005 and 2010). Of the many regional monographs, one can pick out Parlasca (1959) on Germany; Von Gonzenbach (1961) on Switzerland; and Dunbabin (1978) on the figure scenes of North Africa. Excellent studies of mosaics from single sites are Levi (1947) on Antioch; Schmid (1993) on Augst, Switzerland; and Hoffmann, Hupe, and Goethert (1999) on Trier, Germany. Finally, the evidence of mosaicists' signatures and their social status is conveniently collected by M. Donderer (1989, 2008).

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CHAPTER 15

Roman Sarcophagi

Michael Koortbojian

The marble sarcophagus emerged as a vital aspect of Roman sculptural production when, at some point in the later first century CE, cremation gradually began to be supplanted by inhumation as the dominant funerary form, a revolution in social practice that was all but complete within little more than a generation, by which time inhumation—for all but the poor—had become the prevailing mode for the disposition of the dead. While the causes of this change are unknown, there is nothing in our sources to suggest that the reasons were religious, and an adequate, compelling explanation remains beyond our grasp (most recently Davies 2011). The transformation of burial customs that ensued was, however, dramatic, as the evidence of some 15,000 surviving sarcophagi (intact or in part) demonstrates. This change in the means for the disposition of corpses spread to the far reaches of the Empire, and brought with it a set of new requirements for burials (Nock 1932; Turcan 1958). Not only were caskets for the dead necessary, but a plot had to be purchased (since burials were effected on private land) and a tomb constructed that was now of sufficient size, within which a group of sarcophagi might be placed. In striking contrast to the large number of ash urns that might previously have been deposited in a single tomb of modest dimensions, the large scale of the new funerary form imposed limitations on how many such caskets a tomb might contain, and established a more obvious hierarchy in many such sepulchers where, alongside the sarcophagi, cremation burials continued to be used for a proprietor's freedmen and slaves.

The sarcophagus brought with it as well a decisive transformation of the conventions long established for funerary imagery. The traditional “house” tombs, such as those found along the roads leaving many cities and towns—for example, outside Pompeii's Herculaneum Gate, or those along Rome's Via Statilia—had displayed their sculpted decoration, portraits, and inscriptions on their façades, addressing a large potential public audience of those who passed them by. These tombs gave way to a new type, as the employment of sarcophagi redirected this imagery inward and addressed it to a limited spectatorship of family members and that larger circle of friends and dependents that the Romans knew by the name of *familia*. The sarcophagi thus served as an interior embellishment of a new, distinctively private form of sepulchral monument, in which commemorative practice abandoned its former public proclamations in favor of a more limited audience, and, consequently, a strikingly more intimate encounter with the imagery by means of which the dead were celebrated.

This new “inwardness” of the tombs (Zanker 2000), a result of their decoration being withdrawn from the public sphere, asserted with novel force the intimacy of the sepulchral context as well as the specifically funerary significance of the sarcophagi and their imagery. A vast repertory of images was thus enlisted to serve in this setting; while most of this imagery was well known from other genres and contexts, its employment at the tomb was subject to a consistent set of circumstances that structured the spectator's response. Gathered together on

those prescribed days of the year when religious traditions required the commemoration of the deceased, family and friends would visit the tomb, where, in the dim, flickering light of torches and oil lamps, the sarcophagus imagery that they encountered would fulfill its purpose as its themes and designs served to characterize the dead whom those visitors had come to recall and to celebrate.

The precise relationship of such celebrations to the practice of Roman religion is little understood. The buried dead were dedicated, according to tradition, to the *di manes*, that collectivity of divine spirits of departed ancestors whom the recently deceased had gone to join. Individuality vanished with one's last breath, and the dead were now enrolled among those semi-divine shades that inhabited the underworld of myth. Thus deified, but no longer distinct, the dead retained a discrete identity solely in images and the memories they prompted—and in this the sarcophagi played a vital role.

The ambiguity of the dead's status was seemingly enhanced by that of the tomb itself. For, according to Roman law, a burial place was transformed by the interment of the dead into a sacred site, a *locus religiosus*, one that lay, ostensibly, outside the purview of public law. This marked the property in which the tomb was set as inalienable and fit only for funerary use (Crook 1967/1976; Ducos 1995). Nevertheless, *in practice*, the Romans seem to have held such traditions, along with the rulings of the jurists, in little regard. For inscriptions inform us not only of the buying and selling of tombs, but of the flouting of legally stipulated legacies, as is suggested by the commonly attested notice, *H.M.H.N.S.* ("This monument does not descend to my heir"), or the more elaborate prohibitions inscribed in Greek on sarcophagi ([Figure 15.1](#)) found in the eastern part of the Empire ("no one else shall have the authority to place another person in [this sarcophagus] or to remove any of the aforementioned persons from it ... because he shall be impious and accursed and a grave-robber, and in addition to this he shall pay to the most sacred treasury 3,000 silver denarii..." trans. Chaniotis 2004). The sanctity of the tomb thus depended on those descendants who upheld religious traditions and who continued to celebrate their family's dead on those stipulated days of the year—on the ninth day after burial for the *cena novendialis*, every year for the *dies natalis*, the *parentalia*, as well as others. On such occasions, and in such a context, the sarcophagi and their imagery—emblazoned across the new, large expanse of the marble caskets—gave visual form to memories of the departed, and helped to ensure that those memories would be lasting.



Figure 15.1 Sarcophagus of M. Aurelius Apellas and family. Mid-third century CE. Aphrodisias, Museum, inv. 6528/S474 (chest) and S475 (lid).

Photo: Courtesy of the New York University Excavations at Aphrodisias (S474 neg. 01/122).

Kinds of Interpretations

The sarcophagi and their various forms, styles, and subject matter have been collected and published, beginning in the late nineteenth century, in a magisterial series of volumes, *Die Antiken Sarkophagreliefs* (all volumes not yet published). The reliefs have had an even longer, and distinguished, history of interpretation (there is an authoritative overview by Sichtermann in Koch and Sichtermann 1982). Their systematic study began in earnest in the late nineteenth century, with the pioneering researches of Carl Robert, whose main interest, however, lay with their subject matter, the mythological images in particular, and their literary correspondences (Robert 1890 and 1897–1919). By contrast, at the turn of the century the style of the reliefs played a significant role in the formalist analysis of Alois Riegl (1901), which attempted to define contrasting categories of *optic* (visual) and *haptic* (material) emphasis in the practice of relief sculpture, particularly as these were to be seen in the evolving styles of the third-century sarcophagi. Several decades later, the chronological development of the reliefs and their relationship to the political imagery of historical monuments was the subject of a series of studies by Gerhard Rodenwaldt (1935, 1938, and 1940). Formal typologies and the continuing use of conventionalized figural forms and compositions were investigated, specifically with respect to the large series of Dionysiac reliefs, by Friedrich Matz (1968–1975), and the battle sarcophagi, by Andreae (1956). This research has formed the model, to some extent, for continuing archaeological categorization effected by the *Sarkophag-Corpus*, directed, until recently, by Guntram Koch (cf. the overview in Koch 1993).

Nor has the vexed question of the religious dimension of the sarcophagus reliefs, and whether or not their imagery should be seen to correspond to the theological doctrines documented in the surviving literary sources, been neglected. This was the subject of a famous exchange of views between Franz Cumont (1942), who advocated parallels between the monuments' imagery and the often sectarian or philosophical views about the afterlife that the ancient sources detail, and Arthur Darby Nock (1946), who disputed the evidence for such parallels, and voiced a trenchant skepticism about the likelihood that the sarcophagi had served as the symbolic vehicles of such doctrines. Nock's views prevail in the Anglophone and German schools (cf. Zanker and Ewald 2004, with Hallett 2005), while Cumont's continue to play a significant role in the French (cf. Turcan 1999 and 2005). Nevertheless, as a fundamental aspect of continuing inquiry, the question of the sarcophagi's theological content has for some decades played a less substantial role, owing largely to the lack of direct evidence in support of either position. In recent times, questions of social status and patronage have been subjects of new avenues of iconographic and antiquarian research by Wrede (2001) and Reinsberg (2006), and the growing sphere of "contextual" archaeology has also made an impact (Cormack 2004; Carroll 2006).

Throughout this long history of engagement with the sarcophagi, it has been the mythological reliefs that have held pride of place, in large measure due not only to the enormous repertory of themes and subjects that are attested by the surviving examples, but to the complexity of issues that such subject matter raises, not only with respect to its literary correspondences, but to those subjects' funerary significance; indeed, the mythological reliefs were the focus of much of the research that has just been described. Alongside the establishment of typologies that has been the foundation of so much archaeological scrutiny, these reliefs have also formed the basis of sustained and specifically art-historical inquiry over the past 40 years, in which they have been studied as individual works of art (e.g., Turcan 1978 and 1999; Giuliani 1989; Koortbojian 1995; Zanker and Ewald 2004/2012; Bielfeldt 2005).

The Malleability of the Sarcophagus Genre

Of the four main genres of Roman sculptural production—portraits, historical reliefs, sarcophagi as well as other funerary monuments, and *Idealplastik* (the replication of Greek figurative sculpture)—the sarcophagi are distinguished not only by the highly structured setting in which they were to be seen and the strictly defined audience who were assembled there to see them, but by the broad range of their design and the wide variety of their imagery. Yet even more striking is that that range and variety display a suitability—indeed, an adaptability—to meet the great diversity of circumstances of their employ. With respect to both form and content, the surviving sarcophagi demonstrate a remarkable flexibility, as the same forms, themes, and subjects proved sufficiently malleable to serve for the commemoration of the dead, be they men, women, couples, or children, of any of those social classes that could afford such monuments. Such an "elasticity" lay at the heart of the sarcophagus form's continually protean development and its long and varied history.

The sarcophagus' basic formal types are marked by their broad applicability (a full survey is

in Koch and Sichtermann 1982). The elementary rectangular casket, augmented by a variety of lid types, received a wide range of decorative treatments, from the most minimal inscribed forms to the most complex pictorial embellishments; a casket might also be employed with its prominent front panel left blank, without even a carved border. The strigilated type ([Figure 15.2](#)), with its repeated parallel channeling, in either an S-shaped design or a simple vertical pattern, allowed for differing degrees of sculptural intervention, as its simple scheme might (or might not) be interrupted by panels with figural compositions. A casket's architectural allusions might be accentuated by a columnar façade deployed in varying arrangements, and amplified by a gable-style lid ([Figure 15.1](#)), with pediments above the small sides. Or the standard box-like form might be replaced by a round-ended *lenos*, modeled on the shape of a wine vat, with its clear dionysiac associations.

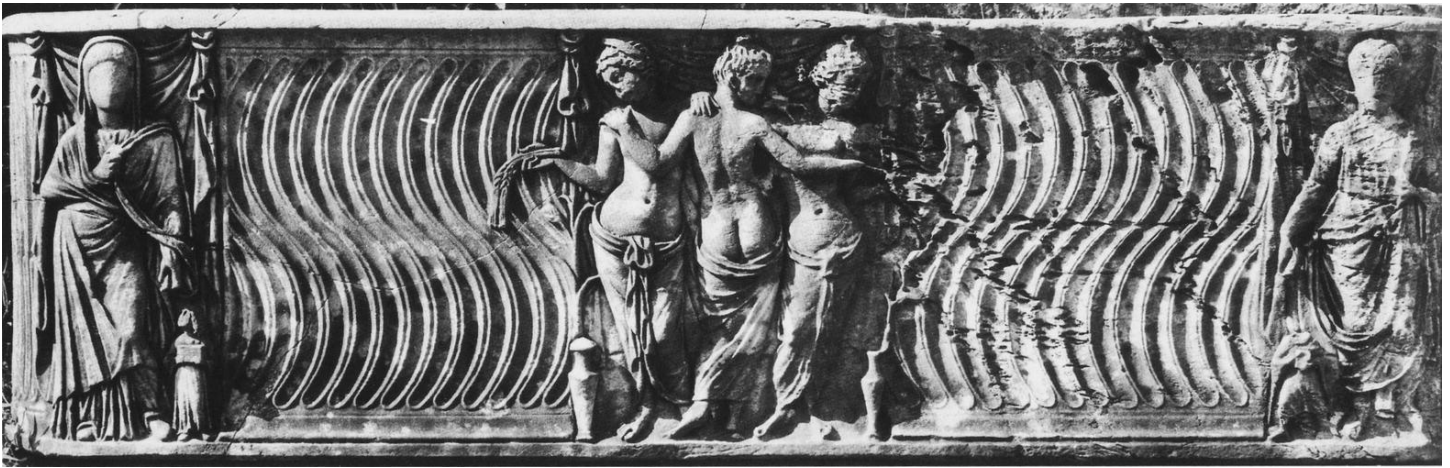


Figure 15.2 Three Graces and patrons with unfinished portraits on end panels. Early third century CE. Withington Hall, Chelford (UK).

Photo: Archäologisches Institut, Cologne Digital Archaeology Laboratory, Universität zu Köln, FA 1462-09/31563 (www.arachne.uni-koeln.de).

None of these fundamental elements of the sarcophagus' repertory of forms were restricted in their usage by the age, gender, or even number of a casket's intended recipients. The same may be said of the decorative repertory, whether comprising garlands ([Figure 15.1](#)), acanthus vines, griffins flanking candelabra, or other related designs. On many reliefs, *erotes* bear aloft an inscribed *tabula* or a *clippeus* ([Figure 15.3](#), cf. [Figure 15.5](#)), often containing a portrait. All of these decorative schemes might be employed regardless of whose remains the sarcophagus was intended to hold, a fact that no doubt played a significant role in the workshops' fabrication of a ready stock of the most desirable designs and themes.



Figure 15.3 *Vita Romana* sarcophagus with empty clipeus and Mars and Rhea Silvia, c. 195 CE. Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, inv. 310683.

Photo: By permission of Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali e del turismo – Soprintendenza Speciale per I Beni Archeologici di Roma.

By contrast, some subjects—notably those derived from the *vita romana* (Figure 15.3), that series of stereotypical scenes of Roman upper-class life—might have highly specific resonance, whether for men, women, or children, and their usage was correspondingly limited. Some were employed solely for men (such as those depicting battles, the key moments of a general’s career, or a magistrate’s induction into office; some explicitly for couples (Figures 15.1–15.2); some for children (particularly youths at play, many featuring *erotes*, as well as on those reliefs that most resemble the reality of social existence with their display of the *conclamatio* around the deathbed). Such specificity is less often the case for women, whose social roles in their patriarchal world were less visible and hence less readily representable outside of the conventional depictions of home and marriage (cf. their maternal roles on the children’s sarcophagi: Huskinson 1996; their shared prominence in those emblems of marital concord signaled by the clasping of right hands known to the Romans as the *dextrarum iunctio*: Reinsberg 2006, 75–85; or, by contrast, the relatively rare appearance of a woman as the distinct focus of commemoration epitomized by the “garland seller” in Florence: Amedick 1991, no. 45).

Yet these were exceptions. Much of the immense repertory of subject matter depicted on the sarcophagi, whether borrowed from literature and myth or drawn from the vicissitudes of Roman life, was as elastic and adaptable as the caskets’ forms. So, at times, adult protagonists appear on sarcophagi whose small size reveals their employment for children, as do mythological themes, such as Meleager or Achilles, which suggest a certain maturity, despite the youth of the depicted figures; conversely, while children or *erotes* might enact adult

pastimes on some reliefs (for example, scenes of hunting, oratory, or dining), their main protagonists' portrait heads reveal, at times, their use for mature youths (Schauenburg 1995; Huskinson 1996). Even the gender of codified forms might be ignored (Birk 2011) and their images refashioned on an ad hoc basis, transforming both those forms and the myths with which they were customarily associated (cf. the transformation of Ariadne into Endymion: Sichtermann 1992, 53–55).

Among the most striking aspects of the sarcophagus genre and its subjects' malleability is the manner in which, on several of the most popular mythological themes, either of the depicted protagonists might be the primary focus. On the reliefs representing Selene and Endymion ([Figure 15.4](#)), or Mars and Rhea Silvia ([Figure 15.3](#)), it is not always clear whether the casket was intended for a man or a woman. Similarly, among the reliefs depicting Adonis and Aphrodite, Jason and Medea, and perhaps even Phaedra and Hippolytos, one finds a differing emphasis on the protagonists that suggests how *either* might have been intended to represent the deceased or his or her surviving spouse.



Figure 15.4 Selene and Endymion c. 170/80 CE. Rome, Museo Capitolino, inv. 725.

Photo: Singer, Neg. D-DAI-Rom 67.32.

Forms of Visual Narrative

The biographical sarcophagi, whether for adults ([Figure 15.3](#)) or children, generally employed a conventional grouping of vignettes, although these might vary, in selection, in number, and in sequence. Nevertheless, it was the sum of these symbolic scenes that called forth the life of the deceased—often specified, not only on those of the biographical series ([Figures 15.1, 15.3](#)) but of the mythological as well ([Figures 15.2, 15.5](#)), by his or her portrait features. The depicted scenes declared those lives to have epitomized the values and virtues that these conventional episodes had come to signal for society at large. Thus, on these sarcophagi, the “biographical” narratives were largely symbolic and stereotypical, or so the repetitive nature of certain examples suggests.

On the basis of their differing narrative implications, three distinct groups may be discerned in the biographical series. The first of these emphasizes the fundamental chronology of the lifecycle. In the case of children, this entailed scenes that stretched from infancy to youth; in that of adults, the *vita romana*, those significant episodes that marked the fulfillment of life as

aristocratic society defined it (marriage, religious duty to the gods, military service to the state). On the monuments of both series such scenes followed one another, without emphatic division, across the caskets' fronts; their biographical focus was often signaled, in the case of children, by changes in their protagonists' age, and in those of adults, by their appearance in their portraits. Here, biographical temporality was represented by narrative continuity, a continuity figured by mere pictorial contiguity, as one scene followed another, side by side on the sarcophagus' main panels.

By contrast, a second group of the biographical sarcophagi—notably those depicting children's games—features representations whose fundamental characteristic is their vivid sense of simultaneity. On many of these reliefs (e.g., Amedick 1991, nos. 63, 274, 278) everything happens at once, as the long, horizontal format comprises a single scene, filled with often indistinguishable youths, all fully absorbed in their play. These single scenes effectively epitomize childhood as such, and, absent any implication of chronology and maturation, thus appear as a counterpart to those of our first group, in which childhood was not a single moment of life, but one phase among many of an individual's development represented by multiple scenes.

Finally, a third group of reliefs abjures the conventions of narrative coherence altogether, and figures their "biographical" content by other means. Chief among these is the juxtaposition of what might otherwise appear as independent scenes or a set of individuated vignettes whose unarticulated relationships are to be inferred if not intuited (as on a strigilated sarcophagus in Rome, where the portraits in the central clipeus are juxtaposed with a bucolic vignette below, as well as a representation of Jonah and a stibadium banquet on the lid above: Amedick 1991, no. 186). In a similar manner, numerous biographical sarcophagi display an intermingling of mythological or allegorical figures (*erotes*, seasons, and the like), whose presence serves to focus the scene's message and structure the beholder's response. Among these are the famous "Rinuccini" sarcophagus, now in Berlin, with its scene borrowed from the Adonis repertory juxtaposed to those familiar elements that epitomized the *vita romana* (Zanker and Ewald 2004/2012, fig. 35), as well as the Vatican's Protesilaus relief (Robert 1897–1919, 3, no. 423), on which the conventional "biographical" image for *concordia*, the *dextrarum iunctio*, has been interpolated on the mythological relief's central axis. And, lastly, there are those rare, later reliefs, such as the biographical sarcophagus found at Lemta (Tunisia), where the vestiges of the traditional *vita romana* type, with repeated scenes of husband and wife, not only take on new form but are accompanied by that of the *traditio legis* (the scene depicting Christ's handing of a scroll to Peter to signify the authority for the new religion's "laws" and doctrines), as if the Christian episode's *pietas* "substituted" for the traditional image of sacrifice found on the monument's pagan precedents (Bejaoui 2002; Baratte 2013). On all of these examples, we witness nothing less than the ancient equivalent of a "collage" (Blome 1992).

The relationship between form and content in the mythological repertory was, if not strikingly different, arguably more complex. The mythological subjects might appear on the sarcophagi reduced to single, salient episodes, or in continuous or synoptic narratives, at times extending their imagery from the casket's front panel onto those at its ends or on its lid. These scenes

might follow the versions known from the literary tradition precisely, displaying their scenes chronologically, as if “reading” from left to right across the casket, as, for example, on the Daidalos sarcophagus in Messina (Sichtermann 1992, no. 26), or the Vatican’s Protesilaos sarcophagus (Robert 1897–1919, 3, no. 423), whose eight scenes follow one another in sequence from the left end, across the casket’s front, and culminate on the right end panel. Conversely, the reliefs might transform those narratives, reordering their scenes as on many Adonis sarcophagi, where the scenes are set in sequence from right to left (e.g., Grassinger 1999, nos. 43, 46, 47) or on the Villa Doria Pamphili Bellerophon sarcophagus (Sichtermann 1992, no. 21), thus seeming, as one scans their front panels (in customary fashion from left to right), to narrate their saga as if retrospectively, beginning with the story’s tragic conclusion. In contrast to either of these possible approaches, the scenes might be rearranged out of narrative sequence so as to emphasize those episodes that were deemed most desirable—and perhaps most appropriate—in the funerary context, often placing them on the relief’s central axis. Thus, this sort of deliberate rearrangement of scenes was clearly an aspect of a myth’s *interpretatio funeraria*, and such remakings of these stories, in order that they might prove more immediately comprehensible at the tomb, may be seen to be at work on several famous examples. For instance, among the very large number (c. 200) of surviving Meleager sarcophagi, on some, such as the Louvre Meleager casket (Koch 1975, no. 116), the transformed chronology of the sequence of scenes from left to right—second, third, then first—allowed the deathbed episode to occupy the relief’s center (cf. the Ostia child’s sarcophagus: Zanker and Ewald 2004/2012, fig. 53, with its clear right-to-left sequence). Similarly, on the Algiers Bellerophon sarcophagus (Sichtermann 1992, no. 22), the three depicted scenes are arranged so that the hero’s triumph over the Chimaera stands at the relief’s center; on the well-known Adonis sarcophagus in the Vatican, the tragic youth is shown seated at the center of the frieze together with Venus, both figures individuated by portrait features, as if to suggest, the mythic saga notwithstanding, that in *this* instance their love survives their separation by death. And on a famous sarcophagus representing the story of Medea in Basel (Zanker and Ewald 2004/2012, fig. 224; cf. [Figure 28.2](#)), despite its left-to-right sequence of scenes, it is the episode of Creusa’s horrific death—not Medea’s imminent slaughter of her children—that stands at the relief’s center; the contrast with the Berlin sarcophagus (ibid., ill. on p. 338), which juxtaposes Jason and Creon on its central axis, is striking and seems hardly accidental, and suggests how patrons and sculptors might transform both myth and message.

Which literary rendition of a myth served as the basis for its depiction on the sarcophagi is not always apparent, and in many instances the reliefs’ immediate sources surely do not survive. Correspondingly, the specifically visual origins of the repertory of vignettes employed for any of the myths on the sarcophagi are only seldom recoverable. Nevertheless, the various number and combination of scenes used in the representation of many stories pose a fundamental question about the relationship between what appears on the sarcophagi as an extended series of episodes and whether or not these derive from earlier pictorial cycles devised to depict these tales. For not all such extended depictions correspond to either a known literary source or to any other surviving depicted cycle. Moreover, in contrast to those myths that are consistently represented solely by one famous narrative vignette, in which the entirety of the ancient saga is condensed, often dominated by one distinctive motif, many of the sarcophagi

are nevertheless elaborated by the addition of complementary elements and figures so as to embroider and embellish the scene, a phenomenon recognized long ago by Robert (1919: “kompletives Verfahren,” developing Wickhoff 1895: “komplettierenden Stile”).

On the mythological sarcophagi, such elaboration of a myth’s fundamental motif (cf. Mars’ arrival to the sleeping Rhea Silvia as it is depicted on the sarcophagus in the Museo Nazionale Romano, [Figure 15.1](#)) might take one of three basic forms. First, complementary staffage and additional figures might be employed to enhance or extend the composition and its existing theme. In this sense, the primary effect of the complementary material is a transformation of style, not of meaning, a characteristic that often distinguishes the late Antonine reliefs, and even more so the larger sarcophagi of the Severan period. Here one might think of the Endymion reliefs, where the basic motif (e.g., Sichtermann 1992, nos. 27–28) is expanded by the “doubling” of Selene’s chariot, the introduction of subsidiary bucolic vignettes, or even more massive amplification of additional imagery ([Figure 15.4](#); cf. the similar treatment on the very late Prometheus sarcophagus now on the Capitoline, discussed by Zanker in Zanker and Ewald 2004/2012, 59–61).

Second, different myths might, on occasion, be combined on a single sarcophagus, where, set in contrast to one another, they might reveal fundamental correspondences and herald a convergence of significances. So Ganymede and Leda were juxtaposed on a lost monument (Sichtermann 1992, no. 145) to signal, among other things, that the love and favor of the gods was equally given to all, to both men and women; the stories of Mars’ rendezvous with Rhea Sylvia compared with that of Selene and Endymion on a relief in the Vatican (Sichtermann 1992, no. 90), so as to suggest not only that such divine love might be reciprocal, but that mortals might dream of its coming to fruition; that of Phaeton contrasted with the image of Castor and Pollux on an arcaded relief in Tortona (Robert 1897–1919, 3, no. 350; Gabelmann 1973, no. 56) in order to evoke a distinction between the audacity to attempt an ascent to the heavens and the attainment of divine status as a reward for merit; or episodes of the lives of Philoctetes, Hektor (and unknown others?) arrayed on a garland sarcophagus in Basel (Gmur-Brianza 1990) to demonstrate that, thanks to the gods, mortal suffering might be overcome just as fallen heroes were redeemed. All such examples demonstrate that the sarcophagus repertory allowed for ever-new combinations and inventions in which a conventional account of the mythologies, or the *vita humana*, might give way to a more personal interpretation, one from which new and distinctive allusions might emerge.

And, in a third kind of elaboration, motifs might be excerpted from one mythological repertory and then inserted within that of another, resulting in a form of “contamination.” This occurs, for example, on the Adonis sarcophagi, where a scene of a “departure for the hunt”—leading a horse—clearly derived from the Hippolytos repertory, has been inserted, contrary to the known versions of the myth (Turcan 1987); on the Attic Achilles sarcophagi, where the “discovery” of the youth on Skyros is contaminated by the episode of his “wrath” directed at Agamemnon who is strangely included in the scene (Rogge 1995, no. 24, with Koortbojian 1998); on a much-discussed sarcophagus from Ostia that amalgamates scenes from the *Illiad* featuring Achilles, Hector, and Patroklos (Zanker, 68–70, and Ewald, 283–285, in Zanker and Ewald 2004); as well as on an unusual relief depicting the Three Graces, elaborated with numerous *erotes*,

doubled images of Cupid and Psyche, and two enigmatic nude youths who recall the seasons (Sichtermann 1992, no. 152). In these examples, the original meaning of the “borrowed” elements, while not consequently lost, recedes, as their roles in the new mythological compositions into which they are introduced take priority over those elements’ former significance.

Thus, one recognizes how, with respect to their narratives, on the sarcophagus reliefs structure as well as sense might prove decisive for interpretation; and as form might challenge content’s obvious precedence, the mythic stories might thus be remade to suit patrons’ needs and desires. From this perspective, it is clear how the sarcophagus image as a whole subsumes the meaning of its constituent parts. Finally, these characteristics of the reliefs—whether biographical or mythological in nature—suggest that their compositions were, at least at times, assembled from individual motifs; thus, from parts of their (and, at times, other) narratives, not from an established, coherent, whole.

The Transformative Power of the Funerary Context

The particularization of the messages conveyed by the sarcophagi, and, as a consequence, the personalization of their commemorative purpose, was surely a product of the highly specialized context in which these messages were conveyed. At the tomb, any and all of the sarcophagus repertory’s subjects might be reinterpreted in light of both their funerary context and their patrons’ desires for self-representation within it, whether those subjects were drawn from literature or from life.

In the sepulchral chambers, all the forms of funerary imagery spoke to their beholders about their patrons—in perpetuity. The carved garlands recalled those real ones that had graced the caskets at the funeral, and did so forever. Bucrania, gorgons, lions, griffins, and sphinxes cast their apotropaic spell as they guarded the dead, unendingly. The Seasons’ gifts are offered to those deceased, all simultaneously, and perpetually. That the tomb was the eternal home of the dead was a commonplace, one that was, at times, underscored by the gabled lids, the house-like forms, the columnar friezes and their aediculae, and the iconography of the door to the underworld; all of which are found on the sarcophagi. For it was in this eternal home that the dead were seen by those who survived them: as banqueters, reclining on their klinai, eternally; as philosophers contemplating, unceasingly; as children playing, endlessly.

In all of these ways, the dead were to be recalled—and they are, to this day. Yet the taste for the varying styles and themes emblazoned on the reliefs changed over time. The surviving sarcophagi indicate an early predominance of dionysiac themes and those subjects drawn from the imaginary world of the sea thiasos (Zanker and Ewald 2004). The blissful world of sensuous, hybrid creatures frolicking amid the waves, or the perennial celebration of the god of wine and his ecstatic drunken revelers, implies a positive vision, not only of death but of the dead, who might be thought to endure beyond the boundary of mortality. Such themes not only offered relief from the sadness of loss and death, but their imagery of a joyous existence provided visual metaphors of a possible—and unknown—existence that was to come at the

end of this life.

By the middle of the second century, however, our evidence suggests that patrons' tastes had changed, and their choices of sarcophagi had come to be dominated by mythological subjects, often those with dramatic scenes of tragic, violent death: Apollo and Diana's relentless slaughter of the children of Niobe; Medea's cruel poisoning of Creusa, the woman who has supplanted her in Jason's affections, depicted alongside the infamous double murder of Jason's sons ([Figure 28.2](#)); the complex saga of Orestes, focused on the murder of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus; and the return of Meleager's dead body or the funerary display of his corpse. These were scenes that emphasized the senseless cruelty of death and the havoc that it might wreak at the heart of a family. Thus, the choice of such representations can hardly have been intended to provide comfort or relief for those kinsmen and friends gathered at the tomb—and can have offered very little in the way of consolation.

This change in imagery from positive (e.g., the sea thiasos) to negative (e.g., Medea) marks the early history of the sarcophagus decoration. Further transformations followed, and the monumental tradition reveals three significant variations that would emerge, subtly, beginning with the final years of the second century and emerging forcefully in the early years of the third. In all three instances, the late second-century emphasis on an imagery of cruel death and the relentlessness of fate diminishes, and is replaced by scenes that bespeak a more optimistic vision of the fate of the deceased—although an optimism often conceived in rather new terms from that which had been evoked by the sea thiasos or Dionysian revelry. All three of these changes imply a continuing response to the established visual tradition, and appear to have been prompted by new conceptions of how that tradition might be transformed to serve evolving attitudes to both commemoration and consolation.

Two of these new conceptions involve what appears, from our modern perspective, as a reorganization of the various mythological subjects around the twin grand themes of *amor* (love) and *virtus* (bravery, virtue; Turcan 1978). First, the surviving reliefs that date from the late second century onward suggest a new taste for myths that offered less painful imagery and a focus on less tragic stories from the traditional repertory. For example, episodes of cruel death that the gods cannot prevent give way to those of amorous liaisons such as Selene's night visits to Endymion ([Figure 15.4](#)); similarly, those of the return home of Meleager's dead body, and of the mourning over his corpse, are rarely found in the third century, while those sarcophagi that had long celebrated his prowess on the hunt, as an image of his *virtus*, continued to be regularly produced. In like fashion, the story of Hippolytos and Phaedra's fatal love is largely remade, as the youth's steadfast rejection of his stepmother's illicit declaration and the violence of their tragic fates is suppressed in favor of a new prominence given to a scene of his departure for the hunt. Such a transformation of the myth is developed most fully on the early Attic sarcophagi (Rogge 1995, no. 56), where the two protagonists are presented divorced from one another, as if in antithesis, so as to underscore the contrast between male and female roles, with the result that the mythic narrative seems frozen in a continuing "presentness." Such representations suggest that the mythological drama is yet to unfold—a drama merely evoked by a scene whose denouement must be supplied by the beholder's imagination (Koortbojian 1998).

Second, we find the transformation of those catastrophic episodes of the mythic protagonists' horrible fates often seen on the early reliefs, so that they might figure as the vehicles for positive memories of the lamented dead. New compositions focused on differing (or wholly invented) episodes of the myths, which were developed in the service of grander commemorative themes. So, for example, the customarily dominant scene of Adonis' death is supplanted on a Vatican sarcophagus (Grassinger 1999, no. 65) by his appearance, seated side by side with Aphrodite, so as to suggest, contrary to all the known versions of the myth, that she might indeed rescue him from his fate. Similarly, on a fragmentary Endymion sarcophagus in Berlin (Sichtermann 1992, no. 100), Selene appears before her beloved shepherd, who reaches out to her, now awake. Or, on those Hippolytos sarcophagi of the Attic series, on which Phaedra disappears from the front panel altogether, leaving a relief dominated by the upright nude forms of Hippolytos and his numerous companions, the transformation not only segregates the two protagonists, but effectively divorces Phaedra's unbounded *amor* from the youth's manly *virtus* (Rogge 1995, nos. 64, 68, 70 with her commentary, pp. 80–81). All such scenes seem to exemplify the freedom of both patrons and sculptors to refashion the myths in the service of their funereal function.

The third of these transformations, brought about by a changing conception of the funerary context and its messages, concerns the emerging role, and the eventual dominance in the course of the third century, of sarcophagi depicting non-mythological subjects. These were developments of the established representations of the *vita privata*, such as those of dining, of the rearing and education of children, or of the careers of magistrates. Here we find, perhaps, the most striking consequence of all these changes: a new emphasis on the realities of the present. Thus, the great second-century series of sarcophagi depicting the mythic battles of the Greeks and the Amazons, or the Greeks and the Gauls ([Figure 1.8](#)), gave way, beginning in the late Antonine period, to representations that glorified the Romans themselves. A novel format was devised that eschewed the artificial sequence of individual combats seen on the earlier battle reliefs—compositions that had their origin in Greek artistic tradition. By contrast, these new scenes of warfare abandoned a stage-like setting and its silhouetting of paired opponents across the frieze; the fronts of the caskets, their dimensions now greatly enlarged, were filled to their full height with a compacted mass of bodies furiously engaged in armed struggle ("Massenkampf"), and thus convey, far more dramatically and immediately, something of the chaos and tumult of actual battle. As a new reference to the historical reality of the present supplanted those former evocations of famous confrontations of myth or legend, so the battle sarcophagus, as a distinctive type, migrated from the mythological series to that of biography.

Images of “Belonging” and Metaphors of Society

This emphasis on the reality of the present is also manifest in the emergence of a host of novel scenes, drawn from everyday life, that are seemingly offered as new exemplars of Roman virtues and values, in place of not only those scenes that had formed the staples of the *vita romana* type (marriage, sacrifice, military command), but the analogs of those scenes that had been drawn from the world of myth. Now images of bucolic repose signal a life of

contemplative withdrawal (*vita contemplativa*); hunting, that of active engagement (*vita activa*); and the life of the mind emerges, as never before, in a broad series of “philosophical” images, employed for women as well as men (Ewald 1999).

These developments suggest new and distinctive insights into the changing forms and attitudes that marked Roman social life of the high Empire and its aftermath. For the sarcophagus repertory comprises representations whose significance to a broad spectrum of society, across the great expanse of the Empire, can scarcely be equaled in any other aspect of the monumental record. Yet, Roman social history is revealed not merely by what can be derived from the study of antiquarian details related, in large part, to the aristocratic classes (Wrede 2001), or by what are recognized as the illustrations of social roles (Amedick 1991; Reinsberg 2006): broadly speaking, the sarcophagus imagery was not limited to a particular social class. Few of the standard, indeed conventional, elements of the repertory were tied, explicitly, to the occupations, the behaviors, or the prerogatives of the aristocracy, who were not the only ones able to afford both these monuments and the tomb chambers sufficient for their display. In fact, many of the various formal solutions (notably the strigilated sarcophagi, with their relatively small figural panels) allowed for caskets that employed the full range of subject matter, albeit with less sculpted imagery and obviously smaller expense. All of this imagery—whether it focused on the past (myth), the present (biography), or the future (mythological analogs or everyday metaphors of the afterlife)—represented a claim of adherence to those values that Roman society held dear. As such, the sarcophagus repertory describes, in its great series of images, the gamut of metaphors by means of which society defines itself: these are images of belonging.

Such varied elements extracted from mythological or human narratives served on the sarcophagi as symbols of participation—at times, specifically; at times, abstractly—in the values and virtues that society had established over time, which were held to be exemplified by those stories and those histories that it preserved from its past as models for its future. Thus, the sea creatures of the mythic past depicted on so many early sarcophagi suggest the pleasures of an imaginary world of carefree joy, and evoke a future for the deceased of boundless, unbridled happiness. Scenes of battle, or of its everyday equivalent, the hunt—whether mythological or mortal—not only express men’s *virtus* in life, but establish the basis of their commemoration for posterity; by contrast, the dedication and *amor* of a spouse, whether in scenes of their actual *dextrarum iunctio* or by analogy to the powerful loves of the women of myth (Selene, Ariadne, even Phaedra or Medea), served in like fashion.

Finally, one must ask not only about the role of the sarcophagus reliefs in the commemoration of the dead and the preservation of memory, but of their role in signaling—indeed, of defining—that unknown future that lay beyond the boundary of this life. The vast array of non-mythological subjects that began to appear on the sarcophagi at the close of the second century are distinguished by their abandonment of themes drawn from the literary and legendary past; these turned instead to representations drawn from everyday life and display the pleasures of dining, of hunting, of intellectual life, and of pastoral repose. Such scenes articulated a novel commemorative repertory of images, images perhaps better suited in a new era to the representation of distinctly *Roman* values. In this new repertory, women as well as men might

dine, read, even hunt (ASR I, 4, no. 167); and these various elements might be juxtaposed—hunting and intellectual life (Ewald 1999, pl. 93.2), hunting and pastoral life (Andreae 1980, no. 56), or the pastoral care of the flocks with the gathering of the muses ([Figure 15.5](#))—in order to effect the contrasting virtues of the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*. No longer fundamentally *retrospective*, this imagery gave form to an afterlife, unknown and unknowable, modeled on the enjoyments of *this* world, and this was the basis for such an imagery's new manner of commemoration and its new power of consolation (Koortbojian 2013).



Figure 15.5 Bucolic scene, Muses, and clipeus with female portrait. Third century CE. Pisa, Camposanto, inv. A3est.

Photo: Singer, Neg. D-DAI-Rom 72.268.

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

The study of Roman sarcophagi has long been, primarily, the province of German scholarship, which has produced the basic corpora of the monuments. These form the fundamental series entitled *Die antiken Sarkophagreliefs* (initiated by Robert 1890 and 1897–1919), as well as the subsequent volumes in the series (including many of the works listed in the bibliography). The Dionysiac sarcophagi appeared as ASR volume IV (Matz 1968–1975) and also independently (Turcan 1966). The basic handbooks are in German (Koch and Sichtermann 1982 and Koch 1993). In English, both Toynbee (1971) and Walker (1985) provide contextualization, and the mythological sarcophagi are treated in Koortbojian (1995), and now Zanker and Ewald (2004/2012). A volume of articles (Elsner and Huskinson 2011) and a special issue of *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* (2012, 61–62), along with two others (Galinier and Baratte 2013, Hallett and Clark forthcoming) offer broad surveys of the field as well as the more recent literature.

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CHAPTER 16

Decorative Art

Friederike Sinn

Roman elite private spaces were adorned by a wide range of different media such as portrait and “ideal” sculpture, wall painting, and floor mosaics, but also by what is usually called decorative art; that is, items that were lavishly decorated with figurative as well as non-figurative images and ornaments, but that often served an obvious practical purpose. Since traditionally they did not count as “art,” which almost by definition had to be non-practical, they have often been neglected by both the general public and scholarship. However, they formed an integral and prominent part of the decoration of Roman villas and town houses (cf. Hallett, [Chapter 1](#), this volume), and even ornamental altars were frequently found in the park-like garden areas (*horti*) on the fringes of the Roman capital. Only exceptional cases, for example tripods or monumental stone baths, can be associated with public space or shrines. In a private house, the business visitor was to be impressed by the careful and tasteful composition of the rooms and thus convinced of the family’s importance. Rooms for receiving guests were designed to set a festive stage (Vitruvius, *Ten Books on Architecture* 6.1–2; Dickmann 1999; Gazda 2010, 79–84). The attorney and statesman Cicero criticized extravagant furnishings in the private sphere as *luxuria* (Cicero, *Paradoxa* 13.49; *On the Ends of Good and Bad Things* 2.23) and may well have been referring not only to sculptures, but also to furniture, all kinds of metal equipment, marble candelabra, relief-ornamented well-heads, and decorative tables. Yet even Cicero himself, to say nothing of his social peers among the Roman political class, evidently acquired these items to furnish his estates, which is hardly surprising given that they were considered the epitome of Greek culture (cf. Neudecker, [Chapter 20](#), this volume). The Roman nobility can therefore be defined as the target audience for these creations, most of which were new developments that spread quickly throughout Italy from the middle of the first century BCE onwards. There was a lively competition for the most impressive furnishings among villa owners.

Various materials, such as wood, metal, ivory, glass, and various types of stone, were used, sometimes in combination, for furnishings in Roman home décor. This contribution focuses on the numerous varieties of stone objects. The reason for this choice is the very dominant visual effect of these objects, as well as the fact that, unlike the Greek art carried off during military campaigns, they were created solely for a Roman clientele (Slavazzi 2006; Cain 2007, 80–89). Items made of precious metals or bronze, such as kraters, candelabra, lamps, table legs, and probably also decorative discs that were hung on walls and trees (*oscilla*), often served as models and were recreated in marble. This transformation process was probably not due to the high value of metal objects, but was rather caused by a preference for the characteristic forms of metal crafts. By recreating the originals in marble, the objects achieved a more monumental quality but were often rendered non-functional, for example in the case of decorative vessels, lamps, and sometimes also candelabra and altars. The production of marble tables and the

reproduction of vases in stone for use as votive offerings or sepulchral monuments in older Greek contexts prefigured this development (e.g., Grassinger 1991, 144–145; Bentz 1998/1999, 186–187; Guldager Bilde 2002, 41–42). The augmented visual effect likely fascinated the Roman public as much as the marble of which they were made. Although the real value of the marble objects can only be determined through indirect evidence, it must have been very considerable (Cain 1985, 22; Moss 1988, 380–381; cf. Pliny, *Natural History* 35.156; Grassinger 1991, 147). Whereas marble had only been sporadically used in architecture in the early second century BCE, the subsequent century saw it make its way into Roman private houses (Pensabene 2002, 3–9). The preferential use of white imported marble for objects of exceptional quality continued into the imperial era even after marble quarries were opened in Italy. This indicates that Greek marble continued to be held in great esteem and demonstrates that it was evidently a kind of trademark feature of this kind of art (Moss 1988, 56–57; Grassinger 1991, 143; Slavazzi 2006, 290). The colored marble that was increasingly mined for the Roman market during the imperial era was primarily used for basins and stone furniture.

The various art forms seem to have developed gradually, and their selection seems to have been affected both by the environments they were placed in and by the social class of the buyers. This development allows us to deduce the functions and relative popularity of the various forms. The oldest imports served to adorn atria in the form of representative tables on which showpieces could be exhibited, and puteals, altar-like architectural elements that adorned and protected the opening of the cistern. Marble candelabra and relief-ornamented vases were decorative eye-catchers that demanded large rooms. Their function was primarily in their symbolic value. The mental images associated with these objects are well illustrated by the Second-Style wall paintings that adorned the houses of the Vesuvian towns with vistas of palatial architecture ([Figure 26.9](#)), and other elements such as altars, fountain basins, decorative vessels, and incense burners (Tybout 1989, 357–368). The palaces of Hellenistic rulers provided furnishings and paraphernalia that may have prefigured these ornate objects of decorative art, given that some of them were made of marble (Harward 1982, 57–79; Kunze 1992, 111, 117–118, 124, 128). Those types of artworks that were particularly demanding due to their size, the skill required for their production, or the difficulties posed by their transportation, such as candelabra, decorative vases, and puteals, began to dwindle in prominence already in the post-Augustan era. The isolated examples found in the imperial villas on Capri and in Posilippo, Sperlonga, and Tivoli attest to their elevated value. The few objects from Hadrian's Villa in Tivoli that had not been altered by later restorations suggest a new impulse in the art of the early second century CE that resulted in many decorative items being reinvented with very unrestricted and imaginative details (Bacchetta 2006, 59–62; Slavazzi 2006, 291–294).

The repertoire of decorative art in Italy changed in the early imperial period, mainly by expansion. The basic form of the *thymiaterion* (incense burner), on which the form of marble candelabra was based, was evolved into purely ornamental stands that merely hinted at the original function. All art forms show a development of their iconography as it was adapted to their new functions. This process is particularly obvious in the case of ornamental altars.

Rather than producing a number of fixed types and faithfully replicating them over and over again, this development led to a repertoire of motifs that could be freely combined and were frequently picked up in other art forms. This unrestricted use of decorative elements was encouraged by the fact that the workshops produced a whole range of different items, as has been shown in a number of exemplary cases (Cain 1988, 157–158; Golda 1997, 21–24; Ambrogi 2005, 139–140, 155–156). Smaller decorative pieces that were of course more easily affordable became increasingly popular when it came to permanently transforming the peristyle into an area for parties. As a result, oscilla, masks, and small reliefs became widespread, especially since they were decorated almost exclusively with Dionysian themes and evoked the festive god Bacchus. Around the same time, a wide variety of decorative fountains started to appear, which could even be installed within the limited space of a Pompeian town house. The post-Hadrianic era saw a significant decline in all types of decorative art, with tables and wells being the only exception to the rule. The first century BCE and CE must therefore be regarded as the heyday of this imaginative decorative art, which brought an air of Greek culture and style to the estates of the Roman upper class and also entered the private living spaces of the lower social classes later on (Dräger 1994, 174).

The emergence, relative prevalence, and lifespan of the individual art forms have been traced in numerous studies in recent decades. Supplemented by an increased interest in ancient housing conditions as well as in the furnishing of public buildings, these efforts now allow us to make more specific statements about “decorative” Roman art. Workshops in Athens were essential in developing and designing marble objects and selecting the elements of their ornamental repertoire. This process is well documented for reliefs, decorative tables, candelabra, vases, as well as altars and relief-decorated puteals, due to the composition and position of the cargo found in shipwrecks, which correlates with discoveries in Athens, and is further exemplified by the use of Pentelic marble and specific Attic design models (Cohon 1984, 76–80; Cain and Dräger 1994b, 818–825; Fittschen 2008, 326–328). Oscilla first began to appear at the start of the imperial era, and were probably also developed in Athens, showing that the Greek workshops continued to be creative. The stimulating role of Delos as a trading hub in this cultural transfer is exemplified by certain table styles, puteals, and basins (Moss 1988, 124–129; Ambrogi 2005, 143–144; Lang 2006/2007, 172). Other Hellenistic cities also provided inspiration for the art forms described here. Floral scroll ornaments of late Hellenistic date from Pergamum influenced the development of decorative design in Italy (Cohon 1984, 45; Mathea-Förtsch 1999, 7, 28–39). The same source is suspected for the so-called Attis figures that featured as table supports. The influence of round altars from the eastern Aegean, especially from Rhodes, on the development of decorative altars in central Italy is clearly visible, but may have been transferred indirectly via Attic workshops (Dräger 1994, 40–43; Berges 1996, 81–83). Alabaster and colored stone products that considerably enriched the range of luxury products in the imperial era were introduced from Egypt. Hard stone items in particular were completed in their country of origin, with Alexandria upholding the old artisan tradition. In the case of large-scale basins and tubs, we can also observe that products were exported half-finished (Ambrogi 2005, 145–146). By contrast, table supports of colored marble were evidently made in Italy, as is demonstrated by the existence of incomplete parts (Moss 1988, 215; Ambrogi 2005, 139).

The high demand led to an influx of sculptors from the east who began settling in Italy in the mid-first century BCE, as has been confirmed for the Gulf of Pozzuoli and Rome (Ambrogi 2005, 137–138, 144, 157, 160–162; Cain 2007, 81–82). From the early imperial period onwards, the art forms were therefore developed in the Italian workshops and in direct contact with the buyers. Oscilla, for example, were produced not only in Athens and Rome, but also in Ostia, Aquileia, and Verona (Bacchetta 2006, 134–138). In the case of smaller objects, scholars assume that regional manufacturing was generally performed using local stones (Moss 1988, 201–202, 223–228; Ambrogi 2005, 140–141, 157–159).

Unlike the traditional forms, which included altars, decorative reliefs, and tables, these decorative innovations were primarily in high demand in the west of the Roman Empire and spread far beyond Italy, especially to southern France and Spain. In North Africa and the Greek east, however, they seem to have been far less popular, as finds are few and far between (Cain 1985, 4–5; Bacchetta 2006, 143–161; Lang-Auinger 2003, 121–128).

Tables

In the large houses of Pompeii, the atrium was usually furnished with a stone table and a fountain mouth ([Figure 19.2](#)). During the first part of the first century CE, this ensemble was frequently supplemented with herms bearing the likeness of the head of the household (e.g., Golda 1997, 27; Dickmann 1999, 108–119; Allison 2004, 86–87). Both the earlier travertine tables on two plate-like supports that stood against a wall, and the later marble tables that were made very visible in the center of the atrium, were used to display exquisite objects of all kinds, primarily valuable tableware, as described by Varro (*On the Latin language* 5.125; Moss 1988, 281–290, 346–350; Stephanidou-Tiveriou 1993, 58–64). From time to time, they even assumed the function of a domestic *sacrarium* (shrine) when statuettes of gods and religious objects were placed on them, as was the case on a decorative table in Ephesus (Moss 1988, 260–268; Rumscheid 2008, 144; cf. [Figure 12.7](#)).

In Greece there was a tradition of using stone tables as votive offerings that began no later than the fifth century BCE. In houses and funerary contexts, they have also been found as display pieces intended to emphasize their owner's status (Cohon 1984, 7, 24–36; Moss 1988, 241–243, 253–254; Andrianou 2006, 251–257). The various table designs that are common in Italy reveal different values as well as functions. The tables that rested on two supporting slabs in the atria of Roman houses thus attempted to link up with a long historical tradition (Cohon 1984, 68–76, 163–165; Moss 1988, 282–286). Supports that were decorated with grotesque figures and floral scroll ornaments were particularly prestigious. These forms were certainly developed in late Hellenistic Athens, but the beginning of the imperial period saw production start in Italy as well (Cohon 1984, 59–105; Dickmann 1999, 115–116).

Simultaneously, more elegant tables with individual legs became a common alternative for the atrium (Moss 1988, 44–52, 185–189, 332–336, 830–832 no. D 50). Their design should be understood as forms of wooden furniture being executed in stone. The same applies to the round stone tables on three legs (known as *mensa delphica*) that were designed with feet

shaped like the paws of great cats and adorned with protomes of griffins, lions, or other animals at the top (Moss 1988, 37–43, 328–332; Lang 2006/2007, 171–173, e.g., Herculaneum, IV.21, Casa dei Cervi: De Carolis 2007, 104, fig. 70). Their immediate precursors can be localized on Delos.

Tables on a single support, which were known as *monopodia* (Livy 39.6.7) or *cartibula* (Varro, *On the Latin language* 5.125), were designed to display only one side and thus stood against a wall (Moss 1988, 282–284). They were versatile in their use and primarily functioned as eye-catchers, as they were often made of colorful stone. They found favor in the Vesuvian cities during the Augustan period at the same time as the Third Style of wall painting (Moss 1988, 181–182, 263–290, 313–314; Stephanidou-Tiveriou 1993, 58–73). Their predecessors can also be found in late Hellenistic Delos and probably in Athens as well. The single foot is usually decorated with a herm that is aligned for frontal orientation. Whereas the herm-adorned supports were originally carved from single pieces of stone, a more efficient production method soon arose that consisted in assembling a supporting structure, the main part of the table leg, and the bust itself to make the final support (Moss 1988, 25–37, 306–327). A table from Herculaneum ([Figure 16.1](#)) illustrates this technique, even if its parts did not originally belong together: the support and tabletop are made of breccia corallina and the inset bust of a bearded warrior with an Attic helmet is made of white marble (Moss 1988, 547–548, no. A 198). Besides the traditional head of Hermes, the separately crafted herm busts also display a great diversity of other characters, most of which are Dionysian ([Figure 6.2](#)). Frequently recurring forms of hairstyle, beard, and wreath crown were varied in almost endless combinations (Rückert 1998, 188–202). A good example of the variety of forms available in the repertoire of the imperial era is provided by the depictions of the head of a youth wearing a Phrygian cap that had probably been imported from Asia Minor. On table legs, it can be understood as an oriental servant figure, as is suggested by full-length depictions with a ladle (Stephanidou-Tiveriou 1993, 34–37, 193–195, 307, pl. 101). The miniature busts made of various types of marble were also put up on their own and were very popular in Italy and the western part of the empire (Rückert 1998, 182–183). They were probably crafted in specialized workshops before being sent to local production sites for further processing, as is illustrated by the workshops discovered in Pompeii (Moss 1988, 229–238). This art form thus modified both form and function of the Hermes herm, which had originally served as a protective cult image in Greek homes, by emphasizing its decorative qualities.



Figure 16.1 Monopodium, Ercolano, Antiquarium, inv. SAP 7678/1500.

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Given their high utility, it is hardly surprising that tables with figurative decoration were produced until late antiquity, and we have evidence of various production centers for table supports. Outside Italy, there was extensive production in Athens between the middle of the second century and the third quarter of the third century CE. In the late period, the high-quality work of studios in Asia Minor is particularly conspicuous until it diminishes in the fourth century CE (Moss 1988, 13–19, 295–303; Stephanidou-Tiveriou 1993, 209–231). Some tables of the late period seem also to have been used in the Christian cult, as is suggested by their find spots and by the use of figures with a Christian background such as Jonah or the Good Shepherd (Stephanidou-Tiveriou 1993, 68–73, 303). The figurative decoration of the monopodia is a particularly good indicator of the continuous adaptation of an originally Hellenistic type of furniture to current themes. The first centuries were dominated by Dionysian images and figures that make general reference to a table's function during banquets, such as oriental servants, the divine cupbearer Ganymede, as well as drunken figures. The rest of the repertoire is consistent with the range of themes chosen for the statuary in Roman villa gardens. The decoration of late trapezophora shows a preference for idyllic pastoralism, including the Christian motifs of Jonah and the Good Shepherd (Stephanidou-Tiveriou 1993, 198–199, 205–208, 308). The mainly eclectic figurative compositions were thus adapted to the tastes of the time.

Puteals, Fountain Bowls, Decorative Fountains

The wells that were situated beside the impluvium of an atrium or in the peristyles of the older Pompeian houses were girded with travertine puteals that resembled round altars due to the triglyph-metope friezes that ran around them. This gave the representative area of the house a religious character (Golda 1997, 65; Dickmann 1999, 301–304, fig. 82). Their archetypes can be seen in the marble puteals of the late Hellenistic houses on Delos (Golda 1997, 16–17, 26–27). In 67 BCE, Cicero ordered two well-heads with figurative decoration for his villa in Tusculum through his art agent Atticus in Athens (*Letters to Atticus* 1.10.3). At that time, they were already a familiar luxury design that had probably been developed in Athens (Golda 1997, 17–19, 36–37). The fact that he ordered two such puteals may suggest a decorative arrangement as counterparts, as has been found in the imperial villa on Capri as well as in Pompeii (Golda 1997, 27–28, no. 22, 24; Dickmann 1999, 304, fig. 84). Over time, this practical feature established itself as a design element in its own right, leading to the production of counterfeit versions with a bottom plate that could function either as decoration or as part of a water fountain (Golda 1997, 25–26, 68). The fact that puteals assimilated the appearance of round altars already indicates that the art forms were blending into each other (Golda 1997, 35–37). On examples from the imperial era, processions of the gods were particularly popular, along with decorative garlands and cult paraphernalia. The installation and consecration of puteals in shrines and public places confirm their religious aura, which

was apparently equally sought after in private contexts (Golda 1997, 26–32). An example of a pseudo-puteal in the Prado ([Figure 16.2](#); Schröder 2004, 288–294, no. 158), probably from the first decades of the first century CE and outstanding for its dimensions and figurative relief frieze, illustrates preparations for a Dionysian festival. Additional props such as decorative vessels, altars, and an oscillum hanging from a grapevine exactly correspond to the design elements that were used to transform the gardens of Roman villas and houses into Dionysian groves. Interest in extravagantly designed marble puteals faded again in the post-Augustan era, probably because their original function as well-heads was only ensured in places where people were dependent on cistern water, such as in Ostia (Golda 1997, 19, 27, 32–33).



Figure 16.2 Ornamental puteal, Madrid, Museo del Prado, inv. 173-E.

Photo: Neg. DAI-MAD-WIT-R-18-95-13.

In lieu of cisterns, increased use of pressurized water pipes led to new forms of decorative fountains and wells that spread villa flair to every house (Zanker 1998, 156–160; Dickmann 1999, 303–309; Ambrogi 2005, 17–71; Schmölder-Veit 2009, 20–25, 53–57). Depictions of fountain bowls with jets of water as components of garden scenes in paintings confirm their popularity (Figure 26.4). A particularly extravagant ensemble of bowls and basins on supports with water flowing into them from bronze statuettes is preserved in the House of the Vettii in Pompeii (Figure 26.2; Jashemski 1993, 153–155, figs. 166–175). The small statuettes with feed pipes were mass-produced in the Vesuvian cities. Rather than producing them whole, they were created in an efficient production process by assembling them from pre-made components that even allowed for a certain degree of thematic variation (Mattusch 2005, 305–314).

The usually rather plain fountain basins were either square (*alveus* type A) or round (*labrum*) and mounted on a tall foot. Their predecessors can be seen in Greek *perirrhanteria* and *louteria*, which were used for religious cleansing by visitors to shrines or for secular washing (Ambrogi 1995, 13–19; Barbagli and Cavalieri 2002; Ambrogi 2005). The discovery of *labra* in Roman shrines and the installation of a basin along with a water-dispensing herm in the baths at Herculaneum also betray these origins (De Nuccio and Ungaro 2002, 365–366, fig. 1; Ambrogi 2005, 37–40, 307–308 L 145). To make them visually more impressive, the fountain bowls were crafted not only from white marble, but also from imported colored stone. However, they were often only given their final touches at the destination, unlike the smaller basins made from Egyptian hard stone, which were also transported as complete products until the middle of the imperial era (De Nuccio and Ungaro 2002, 365–367 (S. Violante); Barbagli and Cavalieri 2002, 51, 71–72; Ambrogi 2005, 145, 149–151, 157–158).

Decorative fountains with water steps played with the visual and acoustic appeal of this splashing and gurgling element of nature. As an element of decorative art, fountains with water steps were developed in the middle of the first century CE as a miniature form of large and complex fountains of this kind. Evocative motifs such as river gods and nymphs, or water animals, were selected as decoration. Alongside those, however, standard motifs from the Dionysian and pastoral repertoire were also used (Heyken 2004, 117–162).

Fountain basins of colored stone of various dimensions, which are likewise connected with the term *alveus* (type B), were used to decorate both villas and public buildings such as baths in equal measure (Ambrogi 1995, 19–27, 44–46). The basins with embossed faux ring handles and animal-headed water spouts were usually delivered from the quarries in a roughly hewn condition and then finished in Rome. Complete examples in Egypt indicate that the archetypes were designed there (Ambrogi 1995, 51–58; Barbagli and Cavalieri 2002, 54, 71). It is suspected that the models for these basins are Greek bronze, terracotta, and marble bath basins. Monumental designs based on these older models were first made around the turn of the second century CE and continued to be very popular until the early Antonine period (Deonna 1938, 88,

fig. 262–264; Stroszeck 1994, 232–236; Ambrogi 1995, 20–23, 47, 60). The extreme efforts expended for the production and transportation of some of the basins found in Rome suggest that the customers belonged to the imperial household. Their visual impressiveness can still be assessed today thanks to the two basins of approximately 6 meters in length that are now in the Piazza Farnese. They had previously stood in the Baths of Caracalla and are late masterpieces of this form of decorative art (Ambrogi 1995, 141–147 no. B I. 59–60).

Candelabra, Decorative Lamps

Marble candelabra, ornamental vessels, relief-ornamented puteals, and altars were obviously highly exclusive products. Their sheer size, cost, the effort required for their production, but also their symbolic value all indicate that they were exclusive designs whose find spots and early dissemination point to ambitious buyers among the Roman nobility (Cain 1985, 6-9; Grassinger 1991, 142). The rapid drop in production of candelabra and vases in the post-Augustan period coincides with the decline in extravagant villa amenities in this phase and confirms the close connection with the builders of the early Roman luxury villas (Cain 1985, 140, 144; Grassinger 1991, 42; Dräger 1994, 179–180).

The so-called candelabra (on the following see Cain 1985) pick up the shape of three-sided bronze incense burners with a compact base on which a shaft with a fire dish is mounted. Their invention in late Hellenistic Athens as luxury articles for a Roman clientele eager for Greek *ornamenta* has been well substantiated. The new design obviously had to be stouter due to the material being stone and they initially came in two types. Their decorative elements can be traced to various older designs, including even Etruscan thymiateria. These were valued imports in Greece during the late archaic and early classical periods. The protomes of lion griffins on the corners of the oldest type of base (Type 1) are, by contrast, an element that can be dated to the second century BCE at the earliest and substantiates the late development of this eclectic creation. One candelabrum that has been reconstructed to full size represents this particularly popular form. It comes from the ship that sunk in 75 BCE off the Tunisian coast near Mahdia with a cargo of luxury products on a journey from Athens to Italy ([Figure 16.3](#); Cain 1985, 26, 192–193, no. 115, pl. 7.3; Cain and Dräger 1994a, 240–255, figs. 1, 8–11, 14, pl. 6, 7). The base, shaft, and fire bowl were produced separately and reach an impressive height of two meters, a height that was still exceeded by other candelabra. The careful undercutting of the bases of the early marble versions show the great efforts made to remain faithful to the bronze originals.



Figure 16.3 Marble candelabra, Tunis, Bardo Museum, Inv. C 1208.

Photo: Rheinisches Landesmuseum Bonn, Neg. LVR.

Many of the surviving examples of these two basic types were executed in Greek marble and were therefore directly imported from Greece. During the Augustan era, these imports inspired the blossoming studios in Rome to create variants and new forms. This is indicated not only by iconographic features, such as the use of Italian and Roman scroll patterns and other ornaments, but also by the figures in the relief panels. Apart from Dionysian figures, propitious deities are particularly common. The sculptors of these more recent candelabra had clearly embraced marble as a material and were not as closely concerned with imitating metal forms. By contrast, adherence to the form of the original functional equipment is pursued through the higher proportioning of the shaft. The composition of the shaft out of individual parts indicates a streamlined mode of production. Among candelabra, multiple noticeably faithful replicas can be identified even over a long period (Cain 1985, 71–72). It was evidently desirable to duplicate the prized models as authentically as possible. This is particularly visible in the small number of candelabra produced in the Hadrianic period, which differ only in details from earlier models that are more than 100 years older.

Depictions of candelabra with hemispherical upper sections illustrate that they were understood to be incense burners well into the imperial era, just as their forebears were. The first century BCE increasingly saw flames appear in the fire dishes and the apparatuses were evidently also considered sources of light (Cain 1985, 13–16). The use of specific monumental examples, however, could not be substantiated in any way. A playful further development of this art form even saw them used as decorative stands for fruit baskets, pine cones, and nests with cupids, or as stands for reliefs. Thus, the candelabrum developed into a purely decorative element that was both executed as a monumental marble object and depicted in wall paintings (Cain 1985, 16–17; Spinola 2004, 78, 80, no. 3, 115–116, no. 69).

Discoveries of monumental marble candelabra from villas have so far been limited to large estates, including imperial villas such as Hadrian's villa in Tivoli. Although the context in which they were put up could not be precisely identified in any case, depictions of candelabra make it clear that they were always positioned in an architectural context, be it in pairs at the sides of entrances and alcoves or at regular intervals between columns. Individual examples come from shrines of "oriental deities," but also from basilicas, baths, and theaters. The fact that some marble candelabra were found in cemeteries, and that they are depicted in grave tomb decoration and on grave reliefs, agrees with the significance of light and incense burning in the funeral cult, and indicates that they may have had some significance in ritual contexts. The ceremonial candelabra may have had a vaguely religious flavor, but will have primarily evoked festive associations. They were also linked to concepts of *dignitas* and *gravitas*, which connote moral standards in the rhetorical writings of the late Republic.

Marble reproductions of chandeliers, on the other hand, were undoubtedly inspired by objects from the inventory of temples. As the wall paintings in Pompeii show, they seem to have been decoratively hung between columns or from ceilings (Pompeii, Reg. V, 2,1, Casa delle nozze

d'argento: *PPM* III 1991, 702 fig. 53.54; Pompeii VI.17.42, Casa del bracciale d'oro: *PPM* VI 1996, 118 fig. 152; Aoyagi and Pappalardo 2006, 197 fig. 1; 199 figs. 1, 3; for temple lamps: *ThesCRA* V, 2005, 366; see earlier discussion of cult instruments). The lamps have nozzles all the way around and show decorative relief decoration on their undersides that artfully imitates toreutic work. A whole set of six such lamps is part of the pre-imperial furnishing of a villa in Fianello Sabino ([Figure 16.4](#)), whose exquisite composition points to an owner with artistic tastes (Vörster 1998, 49–52 for nos. 41–46; 72–73, no. 41, fig. 31, pls. 37, 38.2). The fact that they were found in a context exclusively featuring imported sculptures indicates that these decorative pieces were also invented in Greek workshops of the early first century BCE, perhaps on Delos (Vörster 1998, 56). Unlike other art forms, the so-called temple lamps were relatively unpopular, as is indicated by their infrequent discovery in theaters, villas, and houses (Vörster 1998, 50–60 with nn. 260–262; Hagenweiler 2004, 179; Sinn 2006, 164 with nn. 7–8; Bacchetta 2007, 37).



Figure 16.4 Marble lamp, Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, inv. 125843.

Photo: K. Anger, Neg. D-DAI-ROM-97.139.

Decorative Vessels

Marble vessels copy forms that were commonly used during banquets (on the following see esp. Grassinger 1991). Not only amphorae and kraters, but also kantharoi, skyphoi, kalathoi, kylixes, and rhytons were monumentalized this way. Particularly popular were large kraters

that played a central role in feasts as wine-mixing vessels, as is exemplified by their outsized depiction on Hellenistic banquet reliefs. Figuratively decorated marble kraters may have been developed at about the same time as candelabra in Athenian workshops. The oldest verifiable examples also come from the cargo of the ship that sunk near Mahdia. It is suspected that they had been completed a few decades prior to transport (Grassinger 1991, 13–15, 213–215, no. 53–57; Grassinger 1994, 259–276). Four man-sized kraters could be reconstructed from fragments. Metal originals from the classical period were used as inspiration for their forms, but they were not copied one to one. The integration of specific details taken from more recent works reveals an eclectic procedure, which is further confirmed by the composition of the figurative friezes. Individual template figures were combined to create divine processions or dance formations, which were frequently arranged around a central motif as a goal. The vessels that were produced in Italy from the mid-first century BCE onwards can be identified by their more slender shapes, which also correspond to the bronze vessels of the Vesuvian cities. Marble kraters were particularly widespread during the final decades of the Republic and the Augustan era, while only individual pieces have been found for the following periods, all the way to the period of early Christian art.

The figurative relief decoration on kraters focuses on Dionysian themes. In wall paintings, the vessels are frequently combined with a thyrsus and ribbons, so that they appear as votive offerings to Bacchus as the patron of festival culture in Roman life (Rix 1990, 25–26, pls. 43–49; Grassinger 1991, 146–147). A completely preserved volute krater made of Pentelic marble probably decorated the nymphaeum of the Villa San Marco in Stabiae ([Figure 16.5](#); Grassinger 1991, 178–180, no. 21; Miniero 1999, 311–312). Its frieze shows a Dionysian thiasus in an archaizing style, which makes the krater a precious ancient item. Other vessels show themes that are also found in the statuary decorations of villa gardens such as Odysseus' adventure with Polyphemus, or themes of a light and idyllic nature such as mythical weddings.



Figure 16.5 Volute krater, Naples, Museo Nazionale Archeologico, inv. 6779.

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Kraters of this kind have primarily been found in the villa areas and private park grounds of Rome and occasionally in interiors. Depictions in Second-Style wall painting and reliefs often show decorative vessels in architectural contexts (Grassinger 1991, 146–148 on nos. 13 and 45). The integration of marble kraters into water pools and nymphaea probably represents a later, early imperial usage that enabled a decorative repurposing of the open vessel forms in particular (Miniero 1999, 311; Mattusch 2008, 202–203, no. 91; Slavazzi 2006, 291–292). The ornamental vessels may have given an impression of the house's lavish affluence and a festive atmosphere.

In post-Augustan times, plainer vessel forms such as the skyphos, kylix, and kantharos came to the fore, as well as hybrid forms of various types. This probably reflects the development of decorative home furnishing in broader social strata. As with candelabra, a renaissance can also be seen for marble vessels under Hadrian. While the early discoveries from Hadrian's Villa in Tivoli were distorted into fanciful creations under restorers like Piranesi, more recent discoveries from the villa surroundings attest to an innovative ornamental vessel design that was largely freed from the constraints of tradition (Slavazzi 2006, 293, fig. 3; Sapelli Ragni 2010, 186, no. 12; 208, no. 28; 219, no. 35; on the so-called Piranesi vases: Bosso 2005, 32–49; Slavazzi 2006, 293–294).

Ornamental Reliefs, Masks, Oscilla

An entire repertoire of mostly small-format artworks served to make interiors evoke the festival god Dionysus. Numerous houses in the Vesuvian cities illustrate this way of furnishing, which was also taken up in wall painting and offered a stimulating backdrop for festive gatherings (Figure 26.6; Bacchetta 2006, 387–399). Replicas and depictions of theater masks were indicators of these transformations of interiors, with portraits of poets occasionally supplementing the ensemble. However, although similar ornamental elements have yet to be discovered in the home furnishings of Delos, which are considered prime examples of Hellenistic home décor until the first decades of the first century BCE (Dwyer 1981, 250), the fact that rooms of a house in Ephesus from the late Hellenistic/early imperial period were decorated with large terracotta masks documents an analogous development in the Greek east (Lang-Auinger 1998, 117–131). In Italy, these types of ornamental art can be found from the late first century BCE onwards. Their universal perfection shows a new, specifically Roman décor that primarily conquered the peristyle gardens of early imperial houses. The Casa degli amorini dorati in Pompeii offers a particularly richly decorated example, with a sacred grove of votive reliefs and herms in the garden area as well as decorative discs and masks that hung in the spaces between the columns of the framing colonnades (VI.16.7 F: *PPM V* 1994, 741–777, figs. 48–120; Zanker 1998, 168–172; Mattusch 2008, 183–189). Vase paintings of the fifth century BCE already show Dionysian scenes that include masks hanging in the intercolumnia of colonnades, and thus illustrate the ideal models on which these decorations were based (e.g., Green 1982, 238–240, figs. 2–4).

The Dionysian theme was probably inspired in part by the Greek votive reliefs that turned up as individual pieces in the hands of Roman collectors (Kuntz 1994). Reliefs on which famous Greek poets are depicted, or the series known as the Ikarios reliefs, an eclectic creation that depicts Dionysus' visit to a feast, indicate that the theme was conveyed via this medium. Its depictions can be followed in successive steps from votive or grave relief to the ornamental relief (Micheli 1998, 8–32; Sinn 2000, 394–408; Heinemann 2011, 398–403). Ultimately, attractively composed reliefs with depictions of dancing maenads and thiasoi from the mid-first century BCE were part of the newly conceived repertoire with which the so-called new Attic workshops in Athens excited the Roman buyers (Grassinger 1991, 119–138; Barr-Sharrar 2008, 122–148; Schröder 2009, 202–204, no. 22; 226–229, no. 29).

By contrast, small panels showing arrangements of masks are more likely to be an invention of Roman workshops. These panels were in great demand in the early imperial era and throughout the first century CE (Cain 1988, 114–156, 160, 190). The often double-sided, rectangular reliefs gave the impression of votive reliefs when mounted on pillars. As an alternative, they were set into walls, as was customary for other reliefs, and as Cicero (*Letters to Atticus* 1.10.3) had called for in his villa in Tusculum (Cain 1988, 108; Mattusch 2008, 209–212, no. 93). The resulting expansion of the pool of mask types beyond the repertoire of traditional theater masks by adding mythical designs, as well as the frequent depictions of the masks as complete heads, are reflections of the liberation of the art form (Cain 1988, 164–165). Ritual objects from the cult of Dionysus appear as embellishing details on the reliefs, suggesting that the masks are to be seen as symbols of the hedonistic world of joy embodied by Dionysus (Cain 1988, 181–185).

The proliferation of theater masks in many areas of Roman life can confirm the establishment of masks as a symbol of good fortune. A comedy mask in Dresden ([Figure 16.6](#); Schröder 2009, 268–270, no. 42), which is quite accurately modeled on the costume masks of the “old man” type from New Comedy, indicates the often high quality of the decorations in the house. Masks that had been worked in the round were usually intended to be hung up and accordingly decorated many of the colonnades of Pompeian houses. Masks were also a popular decoration for fountains (Dwyer 1981, 250). In monumental format, they were the obvious choice for the façade decoration of theater buildings. Early examples of this are the Odeon of Agrippa in Athens and the Theatre of Marcellus in Rome. At these sites, the masks initially adhered to the traditional stock types of Greek theater before the repertoire was expanded in the second century CE (Odeon of Agrippa: Gasparri 1996, 240 with note 40, figs. 1–4; Theatre of Marcellus: Gasparri 1996, 240–244 and 2005, 59–65). The marble masks from Pompeii conform to this tendency of the earlier imperial era, in that they concentrated on the mask types of tragedies, comedies, and satyr plays (Dwyer 1981, 294).

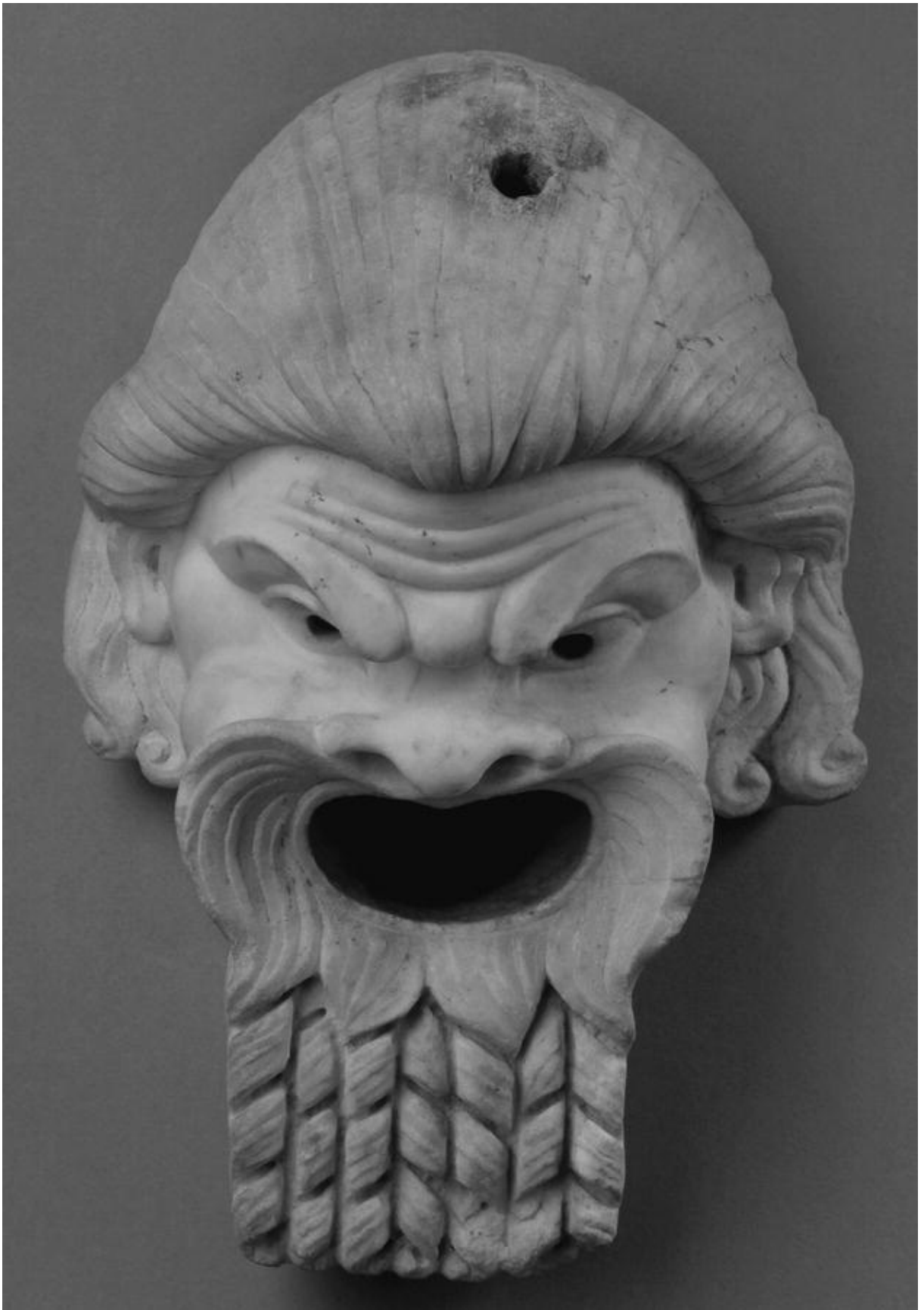


Figure 16.6 Comedy mask, Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Skulpturensammlung inv. Hm 224.

Photo: © Skulpturensammlung, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Neg. Sk-Hm-224-Ekta-2007-04. Photograph by Hans-Peter Klut/Elke Estel, Dresden 2007/2008.

In scholarly publications, the variously shaped, double-sided marble reliefs with some form of hanger are almost exclusively referred to as *oscilla*. This is a term that Virgil (*Georgics* 2.389) used to describe votive offerings to Dionysus that were hung in trees. In earlier times the term certainly also included the masks described earlier as well as other objects with holes for hanging (Corswandt 1982, 5–9; Cain 1988, 108, 175–176; Bacchetta 2006, 26–34, 78–88). Apart from small, square reliefs and similar items in the form of curved shields (*pelta*) or Pan flutes, round discs were particularly popular, as is shown by the approximately 500 examples that have been preserved. Their size only rarely exceeds 50 centimeters. They have mostly been discovered as decoration in houses, but a considerable number were also found in theaters. A find of more than 65 *oscilla* from the theater of Verona, where they decorated the arches above the cavea, confirms the close connection of this art form with the theater god (Bacchetta 2007, 25–48).

Two discs that are datable to the early Augustan period come from Athens and Rhodes and indicate that this art form originated in Greece, probably in Athens (Corswandt 1982, 10–14 K 8–9; Bacchetta 2006, 136–137; T 29; T 142). Sparse evidence from discoveries in Italy suggest that they appeared only slightly earlier. This evidence also substantiates an early domestic production and has recently cast doubt on the origin of their creation in the Greek east (Corswandt 1982, 14–16 K 106; Bacchetta 2006, 67 T 165, 169–174). After an initial boom in the Augustan period, *oscilla* once again became very popular under Nero and the Flavians, only to be largely ignored again after a short revival in the Hadrianic era (Corswandt 1982, 10–63; Bacchetta 2006, 67–76). A relief in Dresden ([Figure 16.7](#)) shows the particularly popular theme of an ecstatically dancing Satyr who is a stand-in for the other participants in the thiasus (Schröder 2009, 223–226, no. 28). Cupids and theater masks form a second main group of the themes, which as a whole reflect the thematic spectrum of the sculptural decoration in the early imperial-era gardens of the Vesuvian cities. Mythological figures are rarely used (Bacchetta 2006, 175–278).



Figure 16.7 Oscillum, Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Skulpturensammlung inv. Hm 321.

Photo: © Skulpturensammlung, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Neg. Sk-Hm-321-Ekta-2008-01. Photograph by Hans-Peter Klut/Elke Estel, Dresden 2007/2008.

Ornamental Altars and Tripod Bases

Smaller altars and tripod bases refer to Greek precursors whose function was significantly changed in the Roman west (on the following see esp. Dräger 1994). They became mere icons of their former functionality, sacral symbols that seem to have been mainly valued for their

ornamental effect. Whether a marble altar was used for rituals or not can usually be discerned by whether the top was equipped for the performance of burnt sacrifices. Many, however, have a level surface on which it was only possible to place small, portable incense altars. In other cases, the altar-shaped monuments can scarcely be distinguished from elaborately decorated bases and reveal blurring borders between the art forms, as we also observed in the case of the puteals.

While the smaller group of rectangular altars takes on various forms of Greek monumental altars, the far more popular round altars were inspired by a type that started to become widespread in the eastern Aegean in the late third century BCE and was usually employed in the funerary cult (Dräger 1994, 38–43; Berges 1996, 66–71). The garland decoration that they commonly show was primarily adopted in central and northern Italy. The precursors to the popular figuratively decorated *arae* can be seen in isolated examples of late Hellenistic altars with dancers, muses, and Dionysian scenes from various locations in the eastern Aegean (Berges 1996, 82–83). Thus, Dionysian thiasus scenes and processions of the gods dominate the relief decoration of the pre- and early imperial altars, whose influences can be traced back to the export-oriented workshops of Athens. These universal themes were well suited to the function of these altars in shrines or sacred spaces on the forum. However, they likewise fulfilled the requirements for being placed in a villa environment that usually included areas with a sacred connotation. The popularity of Dionysian figure friezes in this art form is also the best indicator that this theme was used in decorative art of the imperial era to express the metaphorical sentiment that art was the religion of the Roman *otium*. Altars with friezes of dancers or simple garland decoration were also integrated into stage fronts (*pulpitum*), where they served as reminders of the religious roots of the Greek theater tradition.

As in other art forms, there are variants among the altars that also reveal an enthusiasm for all things decorative. Thus, for example, ornamental forms taken from candelabra were integrated into their construction, or elements of equipment and furniture that could completely smother the body of the altar itself were added. This development began in the Augustan era and continued into the second century CE.

Starting in the Augustan period, new pictorial themes were developed for particular functions. Cult altars received decoration adapted to their respective gods, which often took the shape of subtle allusions, such as depictions of the plant associated with the god. Altars from funerary contexts were decorated either with the universal themes of the thiasus and the procession of the gods, or else with motifs adapted to the setting, such as depictions of the underworld. Some of the altars dedicated by the *vicomagistri* depict not only the Lares, who were the recipients of the dedication, but also the official duties of these magistrates ([Figure 11.4](#); cf. Hölscher 1988, 390–398; Dräger 1994, 67–68).

Among the creatively decorated bases with triangular footprints that could accommodate various metal instruments, tripod bases stand out as a functionally coherent group (Dräger 1994, 73–74, 86–96). The central political significance of Augustus' consecration of tripods to his protective deity in the year 28 BCE led to a series of tripod monuments that continued without interruption until the early second century CE. These objects can be seen as universal

signs designed to invoke the well-being of both the state and private matters. The three-sided bases, which are usually the only surviving evidence, draw on the forms of ornamental altars. A special pictorial program was developed for a group of bases pertaining to the priesthood of the *XV viri sacris faciundis*, which served to emphasize their loyalty to the current imperial house (Dräger 1994, 74–86).

Research Perspectives

This overview has shown that the decorative art forms of Roman sculpture are rightly labeled as such. Tables, altars, bases, and puteals are based on established types that the workshops of Greece had already been producing for a long time and that possessed firmly defined functions. Their integration into Roman décor correlated with both an enrichment of their relief decoration and an adaptation of their basic forms. The modifications were aimed at producing a more ostentatious effect; a refinement occurred that the selection of precious stone materials clearly reveals. In the art forms that were newly created for a strictly Roman clientele, the decorative effect had priority from the outset. Among these were decorative kraters, marble candelabra, and small-scale decorative furnishings for interiors.

Unfortunately, some groundwork is missing for the array of art forms treated here that would enable us to better understand the interesting process of the Italian adaptation of Greek art. The selection of themes and motifs that were suggested by the workshops specifically to the “target group” of Roman buyers, and became popular with them for a shorter or longer period, can only be clearly established against the background of the full range of Hellenistic monuments—we have seen that some of these themes were more successful on the Roman market than others. In order to illuminate this process, a systematic collection and review of the relevant reliefs and stone “furniture” from Hellenistic Greece are necessary. To date, a comprehensive discussion of eastern Greek funerary altars (Berges 1996) stands alone. While the role of Athens and Delos as agents for the transmission of motifs can be quite clearly identified, that of Rhodes, Pergamon, and Alexandria, for example, remains less clear.

In order to be able to understand the further development of these decorative art forms, as well as their respective importance and semantic content, chronological synopses with analyses of the iconography may produce interesting results. Thorough evaluation of the rich sculptural material from the Vesuvian cities can increase our understanding of residential amenities from the end of the second century BCE until the reign of the Flavian emperors. For the following centuries, the accumulated discoveries from villas as well as public establishments must be reviewed and analyzed. The compilation of workshop groups for individual art forms such as tables, fountain bowls, basins, and oscilla is already well advanced. It provides a valuable basis for questions concerning the organization of production as well as the transmission and use of models and templates. The last few years have also witnessed a growing interest in the stone materials, which had hitherto only rarely been subjected to mineralogical analysis. Further work in this area will undoubtedly lead to new questions about the evaluation and semantic content of those decorative art forms characterized by a variety of materials.

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Most of the art forms treated in this chapter have been presented in extensive monographs based on a thorough collection of the material. Since several works were produced simultaneously as PhD dissertations, questions could be coordinated and stimulated through a productive exchange among young scholars. The publications of Cohon (1984) and Moss (1988) on marble tables were thus able to discuss far-reaching questions about the transfer of the art forms from Greece, the various artistic influences in their décor, and the organization of the workshops in Italy. We have sound analyses of the iconography of figurative table feet produced in Attica from the mid- to late imperial era thanks to the study by Stephanidou-Tiveriou (1993). The books by Dräger (1994) and Golda (1997) on the interdependent art forms of decorative altars and puteals came about as Munich PhD dissertations in close contact and thus reference one another.

In her monographs on fountain bowls and basins, Ambrogi (1995 and 2005) has also taken great care to trace their origins in order to determine origins and original positioning. She focuses on determining the types of stones used and, in doing so, investigates production locations as well as the means of transportation, which, in part, required impressive logistical technology.

The work of Cain (1985) on marble candelabra pays particular attention to the varied, eclectic composition of the early candelabra types that were produced by the Attic workshops. Not least, this has led him to reject the commonly used term “New Attic” art, which does not reflect the interconnected modes of labor in the workshop centers of late Hellenistic Greece. He established this once again in the wider context of all sculptural art in a collaborative essay with Dräger (1994b). In her dissertation on marble kraters, Grassinger (1991) dealt in detail with the iconography of this “species” and produced a historical analysis of both the ornamental and the figurative themes.

Our understanding of the decorative art forms that dominated the furnishing boom in the houses of the early imperial era was significantly improved by the study of mask reliefs by Cain (1988). The extensive group of oscilla has been addressed in two PhD dissertations with a long gap between them by Corswandt (1982) and more recently by Bacchetta (2006). The latter not only thoroughly analyzed the material, which now comprises 526 pieces, but also used the contexts of their discovery as a starting point for their interpretation.

In a concise overview, Slavazzi (2006) produced inspiring notes on the assessment of marble luxury furnishings in the Roman home. He identified aspects of the art forms’ representative and decorative effect that seem to have been of importance for their owners. Whereas Hellenistic Greek décor initially had a stimulating effect on the furnishing of the early villas, the residences of the emperors seem to have usurped this function as role models over time.

Dickmann (1999) and Allison (2004) have worked on reconstructing domestic interiors and the changing styles of their furnishings, based on the newly published inventories of houses in Pompeii. Their attempts at assessing these ideal archaeological contexts, however, also expose the limits to interpreting arrangements and objects in detail. Further information can probably

be gained here by evaluating the casual observations pertaining to the use of space and furniture in the literary sources.

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CHAPTER 17

Luxury Arts

Kenneth Lapatin

Ancient Roman attitudes toward “luxury” were ambiguous. The ability to possess and display superbly crafted objects fashioned from precious substances was highly desirable (as is still the case today). The high cost of raw materials, usually rare and often imported long distances—and thus literally exotic—added to the allure of such items and guaranteed that their ownership was, at least initially, limited to elites. Possession of luxury arts marked wealth, status, and power and thus enhanced social standing. And this made them contentious. Artifacts made of gold, silver, semi-precious stones, ivory, amber, tortoise shell, pearl, fine woods, silk and other textiles, and so on bestowed prestige, but could also bring opprobrium—or both simultaneously. The philosopher Seneca, for example, reputedly prized his collection of 500 tables with expensive imported citrus-wood tops set on ivory legs, but in his treatise *On the Good Life* he questioned his own conscience: “Why don’t you live according to your principles? Why do you have such elegant furniture?” (17.2).

Well-to-do Romans able to surround themselves with luxurious objects were, of course, in a position to experience other, more ephemeral pleasures, such as the consumption of elaborately prepared foods, vintage wines, exotic perfumes, not to mention even more profligate sensual gratifications at lavish banquets and other occasions, and the Roman concept of luxury included such practices as well as finely crafted objects (e.g., Dalby 2000; Dunbabin 2003; Weeber 2003 and 2006). Both objects and actions played important roles in defining social identities and, depending on context, might engender class unity or social division, as they could accentuate inequality and provoke resentment. Perhaps even worse in the eyes of elites, the possession of luxury goods and the practice of associated behaviors could also be emulated by social climbers, challenging or erasing social differentiation. Thus, luxury misapplied stimulated derision, as, most famously, in the case of Petronius’ fictional Trimalchio and numerous figures lampooned in the poems of Juvenal and Martial. The high life has always had its detractors, and it is, above all, open to charges of wastefulness. Early Romans, like archaic Greeks, promulgated sumptuary laws of various sorts on account of diverse motivations: to preserve resources, maintain morals, limit ostentation, and restrict ambition (Lapatin 2003, 86n27; Wallace-Hadrill 2008, 315–355; C. Bruun in Fontanella 2009, 46–51; Zanda 2011). Later, powerful individuals consciously sought to reject the appearance of luxury. After defeating Anthony and Cleopatra, for example, Octavian distanced himself from eastern opulence by taking just one hard-stone bowl from the royal treasury at Alexandria; he did, however, on another occasion dedicate to Capitoline Jupiter as a single offering 16,000 pounds of gold and pearls and other precious stones valued at 50 million sesterces (Suetonius, *Augustus* 30.71).

Ancient Romans constructed their prevailing social identity around the notion of adhering to hearty peasant values. “Luxury,” therefore, was generally conceived of as something noxious.

Luxus, in Latin, is not related to the noun *lux* (light), but rather the verb *luctor* (to sprain or dislocate). At root it is something overextended, and thus, even linguistically, suggests injury, whether to the individual psyche or to the larger social fabric. It is an indulgence, soft or extravagant living, opulence. The earliest appearance of the word in surviving Latin literature is in a comedy written by Terence around 160 BCE, where it is the cause of a young man's ruination: *adulescens luxu perditus* (*Brothers* 760). Other literary examples are equally negative: the historian Sallust refers to the late Republic as "a state corrupted by *luxus* and sloth" (*Conspiracy of Catiline* 53.5). The notion of excess inherent in the term is also present in the verb *luxurio*, which the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* defines as "to flourish immoderately," even "to grow rank," as well as "to revel immoderately" and "to indulge oneself." The various other Latin derivatives of the term, whether nouns, adjectives, or adverbs, all have negative connotations, conveying extravagance, self-indulgence, and wantonness.

Ancient thinkers from Plato and Aristotle through various Roman moralists considered the desire to have more than required by Nature—a desire that was easily inflamed—potentially disruptive. Luxury, they contended, led to softness, effeminacy, and corruption. Early Rome, we are told, was not particularly rich, and later Romans, idealizing their peasant roots, praised frugality. Cicero, another owner of expensive citrus-wood tables and well-appointed villas that signaled his arrival to high social standing, found it convenient in the law courts to attack luxury:

The city creates luxury, from which avarice inevitably springs, while from avarice audacity breaks forth, the source of all crimes and misdeeds. On the other hand, this country life, which you call boorish, teaches thrift, carefulness, and justice.

(*In Defense of Sextus Roscius of Amerina* 75)

Pliny the Elder, in his *Natural History*, the culminating books of which treat precious metals and stones, goes to great pains to argue that gold was a rarity in the early days of the state, and reports that the first to give his son a gold *bullā* (amulet) was not a Roman, but the Etruscan king Tarquinius Priscus (33.4). Indeed, the Romans frequently ascribed their taste for luxury to baneful foreign sources. Although Cornelius Rufinus was ejected from the Senate in 275 BCE ostensibly for owning ten silver vases (Valerius Maximus 4.4.3 and 2.9.3; Aulus Gellius 17.21.39; Dionysios of Halikarnassos 20.13; Plutarch, *Sulla* 1), the origins of the Roman taste for luxury are regularly ascribed to the growth of Roman rule in the Hellenistic period. Pliny complained that "it was conquered Asia that first sent *luxury* to Italy," and blamed Attalos III's bequest of Pergamon to Rome in 133 BCE for first causing the city "to learn not just to admire foreign opulence but actually to love it" (*Natural History* 33.148–149). Other authors cited Rome's earlier victories in southern Italy, Sicily, Greece, and Carthage (e.g., Sallust, *Conspiracy of Catiline* 11.5–6; Livy 37.59.3–5; 39.6.7). While the poet Horace famously expressed his distaste for eastern apparatus and, along with other authors, negatively deployed the Persian word for treasure, other Roman writers recognized that the far west, too, was a source of imported wealth: the river Tagus in Lusitania (now western Spain and Portugal) was a byword for riches in Latin literature, and its gold-bearing sands were invoked by Catullus, Ovid, Juvenal, and Martial, among others (Horace, *Odes* 1.38.1; 1.29.2; 2.16.9. Tagus:

Catullus 29.19; Ovid, *The loves* 1.15.34; Juvenal 3.55; Martial 1.49.15, 686.5, 7.88.7, 8.78.6, 10.17.4, 10.96.3, 12.2.3; *OLD* 755, s.v. *gaza*).

Soon after the beginning of Rome's territorial expansion beyond the Italian peninsula in the early second century BCE, the elder Cato, according to Plutarch, chose to live "in a contracted way in order to correct and moderate the extravagance of others." He ran for the office of censor in order "to cut and sear to some purpose the hydra-like luxury and effeminacy of the time." Victorious, he raised taxes on sumptuous living (*Cato* 5.16.18). A century and a half after Cato's death, the historian Livy reflected on the moral decline of Rome at the height of Empire:

No republic was ever greater, none more virtuous or richer in good example, none into which luxury (*luxuria*) and avarice entered so late, or where poverty and frugality were so honored. For it is true that the less wealth there was, the less desire there was. More recently, riches have imported avarice and excessive pleasures with a craving for luxury (*luxum*) and wantonness to the ruination of ourselves and everything else.

(*History* 1, *Preface* 11–12)

Despite these and many similar negative views, however, luxurious living was highly attractive, and there was constant conflict between virtuous asceticism and the desire to consume. More significantly, luxury objects functioned as visible markers of rank. As real political and military power was restricted more and more into the hands of a few, the possession, display, and appreciation of sumptuous objects demonstrated not only wealth and status, but also high culture and discernment, substitute vehicles of distinction in a changing and highly mobile society. Roman connoisseurs could recognize that some objects were expertly crafted by some of antiquity's most famous artists, or by fashionable contemporary ones, such as Arkesilaos, whose maquettes, Pliny tells us, were as valuable as finished works by others; Octavian is said to have paid him a talent for a plaster model of a wine vessel (presumably to be executed in silver), and Lucullus is reported to have commissioned a statue of *Felicitas* (Happiness) for a million sesterces (*Natural History* 35.45.156), the minimum property requirement of a Roman Senator. Cups fashioned by the Greek silversmith Mentor were widely sought after, and extraordinary prices were paid for carved stone vessels and, as mentioned earlier, citrus-wood tables (*Natural History* 33.147, 154; 37.18–22; 13.91–97).

The Evidence

This chapter will employ three kinds of ancient evidence available for an investigation of Roman luxury arts. The first is the preserved objects themselves: what we might call the archaeological evidence, although many of the artifacts that have come down to us have not been excavated scientifically, but rather have been preserved above ground for millennia, passing through the hands of elites into church treasuries and secular collections. Whatever the mechanisms of their preservation, such objects survive in far larger numbers than presumed in most modern histories of Roman art and are often in better condition than the more familiar examples of architecture and statuary; especially gemstones, many of which we can admire

today in virtually the same state as did their original owners. Second are art-historical representations; that is, depictions of luxury items in other media, whether wall paintings or mosaics, funerary portraits, statues, coins, or even other luxury items, for some of these representations are self-referential, such as images of rings engraved on ring stones or of embossed silver vessels on silver vessels (e.g., D'Ambrosio, De Carolis, and Guzzo 2008; Zwierlein-Diehl 2007, figs. 7, 10; Guzzo 2006, figs. 1, 5, nos. 106–107, 217–218, 410–411; Colonna in Lapatin 2014, 46–51). Such depictions are plentiful (especially from Pompeii and other ancient sites buried by the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 79 CE, which also provides a rare chronological *terminus ante quem*) and are especially valuable as they show luxury objects in use. These images, of course, are not necessarily realistic documentation of actual social practices, but do often provide a glimpse of normative values. The third category of evidence, ancient literary sources, are far more abundant and range across all genres of poetry and prose, from epic to epigram and from historical to epistolary to epigraphic. The writings of ancient authors, of course, are often ideologically charged. Thus, they can be revelatory of prevalent attitudes, but must always be read in context. Particularly important is Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*, which investigates a wide variety of materials and objects fashioned from them, treating their sources, uses, history, and beliefs about them, charged with the author's moralizing bias (Isager 1991; Carey 2003; Lapatin 2012). Full compilation of each of these categories of evidence far exceeds the scope of this essay, and could hardly be contained in several volumes of this size.

Historiography

A word about the study of this subject is also in order: writing about ancient luxury arts is as old as antiquity. The latter books of Pliny's *Natural History* have already been mentioned, and their author, who died investigating the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 79 CE, provides a bibliography of the many works that he consulted. The vast majority of these are lost, but mention is made of ancient treatises on metalworking and gems by artists such as Menaichmos, Xenokrates, and Pasiteles, as well as by scholars and collectors, such as Theophrastus and Juba, king of Mauretania. Pliny's text was known through the Middle Ages and was regularly consulted. The anonymous German monk known as Theophilus drew on it in the early twelfth century when compiling his *De diversis artibus* (*On various arts*). His contemporary, Suger, abbot of Saint-Denis in France, also wrote of the spiritual properties of luxury materials, hard stones in particular. We can trace considerable interest in ancient intaglios and cameos through various medieval *lapidaria*, as well as the actual reuse of ancient gems in reliquaries and other paraphernalia of church and state, such as golden crosses, crosiers, book-covers, crowns, and so on. Potentates in the east as well as the west valued and strove to possess ancient intaglios and cameos, which were often reset in gold and enamel mounts, while larger stone vessels were not infrequently converted into chalices and associated with the Holy Grail (Sena Chiesa et al. 2002; Lorz 2006; Venturelli 2009).

While many medieval collectors seem to have valued these antiquities largely for their materials and some read them in the light of prevailing Christian beliefs, Renaissance and

early modern collectors sought to understand better the ancient imagery that adorned them, and to identify their possessions with the ancient craftsmen who made them and the patrons who had owned them. Gold and silver objects discovered by chance were still, more often than not, melted down for their bullion value, but engraved gemstones were eventually gathered, catalogued, and exchanged by collectors, especially through impressions in wax, plaster, and sulfur, which were widely promulgated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The pioneering art historian J.J. Winckelmann (1717–68) cut his teeth cataloguing the gem collection of the Prussian Baron Philipp von Stosch (1691–1757), and other scholars before and after him compiled scholarly catalogues of aristocratic and princely collections. Recognizing that engraved gems tended to survive in greater number and in a much better state of preservation than statues and other ancient works of art, but shared with them similar iconography and stylistic development, Winckelmann suggested that the entire history of art could be written from gems alone. His catalogue of Stosch's collection was not illustrated, but Stosch had previously commissioned the French engraver Bernard Picart to produce an opulent illustrated bilingual Latin/French volume featuring 70 of the highest-quality ancient gems to survive. *Gemmæ Antiquæ Cælatae/Pierres antiques graveées* (1724) presents (mostly) ancient gems bearing the signatures of their carvers. It was widely distributed and greatly influenced European scholarship and taste, providing models that were copied by Wedgwood and other modern designers (Winckelmann: Lapatin 2003, 87n32; Stosch: Whiteley 1999; Zazoff 1983).

Ancient gold and silver artifacts have fared less well over time than gems, as they were melted down and reused in late antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the early modern period. Nonetheless, both chance finds and scientific excavations have brought to light many important objects over the past several centuries, particularly hoards of silver. Roman gold vessels remain extremely rare, but silver plate, buried at times of unrest and uncertainty, deposited in tombs along with jewelry, or preserved in the cities destroyed by the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius, survive in considerably larger numbers (e.g., Kent and Painter 1977; Baratte and Painter 1989; Pirzio Biroli Stefanelli 1991; Guzzo 2006; Lapatin 2014). Artifacts made from organic materials such as ivory, wood, amber, and silk and other opulent textiles (finely woven, embroidered, or dyed), in contrast, are much less well preserved, although extremely high-quality items in each of these media continue to come to light, albeit usually in a fragmentary state (e.g., for ivory: Lapatin 2001; for wood: J. Liversidge in Strong and Brown 1976, 155–165; Meiggs 1982; for amber: Strong 1966a; Grimaldi 1996; Nava and Salerno 2007; for textiles: J. Wild in Strong and Brown 1976, 167–177). Other luxury items, such as wigs made from the light-colored hair of German and British slaves, known from literary sources, do not survive (e.g., Ovid, *The Art of Love* 1.14.45–46; Martial 5.68, 14.26; Juvenal 6.120; cf. Bartman 2001, esp. 14).

Considering that objects fashioned of the most valuable materials were so highly prized by the ancients (as well as by medieval and early modern collectors), it is rather strange that such works have more recently come to be viewed as “minor arts.” There was no such designation in antiquity, and the history of this devolution is not entirely clear, for its linguistic parameters vary: *Kleinkunst* in German (literally “small art”) does not include tapestries, which are quite large (and the textile arts were as important in antiquity as in the Middle Ages and Renaissance—witness the myths of Penelope and Arachne, to name but two examples). In English, French,

and Italian, however, “minor” does not refer to size, but to status—paradoxically. This devaluation of the precious can be traced, at least in part, to Giorgio Vasari’s influential *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*. Vasari, being a Tuscan painter, foregrounded the contributions of Tuscan painters in his history of art, and denigrated, at least in the second, revised edition of his book, published in 1568, the work of goldsmiths, gem engravers, and other craftsmen. The Vasarian triad of painting, sculpture, and architecture was subsequently adopted by art academies, and this, along with other ideological factors, the widespread production of forgeries for rich patrons, and the difficulties of attribution, have all contributed to the marginalization of the luxury arts in modern histories of ancient art (Lapatin 2003; Belozerskaya 2005).

Artists

In antiquity, such hierarchies did not hold, but as with other media, the artists—or artisans—who fashioned luxury objects often remain anonymous. Greek and Latin literary (as opposed to epigraphic) sources mention only eight gem engravers by name, and all but one worked for archaic and Hellenistic Greek patrons, rather than Romans: Dioskourides, who carved the seal of Augustus, is named by Pliny, Suetonius, and Dio Cassius. The emperor’s signet is lost, of course, but other works of Dioskourides survive, as do cameos and intaglios carved and signed by his three sons, Hyllos, Eutyches, and Hierophilos, who followed him in the trade, and whose signatures indicate that the family hailed from Aigiai in Cilicia (modern Turkey). Numerous other gem carvers also signed their work, and while most of these names are Greek, including several with the names of famous artists (such as Apelles, Boethos, Daidalos, Nikias, Polykleitos, and Skopas), some, such as Rufus, Quintus, Felix, Gaius, and Gnaeus, are Roman. These five, however, all sign in Greek letters, raising the question of whether they were Romans signing in a fashionable foreign language or Greeks who had adopted Roman names (Zwierlein-Diehl 2005 and 2007, 549–550).

Although precious metal plate seems to have been signed less often than gemstones, Pliny mentions more silversmiths by name than gem engravers. Nonetheless, cups signed by artists in both Greek and Latin letters have been found as close to Rome as Pompeii and as far away as Denmark (Calabi Limentani 1958a, b, 1959, and 1960; Toynbee 1961, 51–53). A marble funerary relief of a silversmith of the Augustan period inscribed “Publius Curtilius Agatus, freedman of Publius, Silversmith” indicates that the deceased was a Greek (Agatus being the transformation of the Greek slave name Agathos) who had taken the name of his Roman master (J. Paul Getty Museum 96.AA.40; Lapatin and Wight 2010, 146). Other silversmiths adopted the names of famous Greek artists of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, such as Zeuxis, Apelles, Pythias, and Polygn[ot]os.

Additional information about ancient artisans is preserved on inscribed gravestones and graffiti, such as the tombstones of Doros, an 18-year-old gem engraver (*daktyliokoiloglyphos*) from Sardis, and Lucius Uttedius Hermias, a 45-year-old gem cutter (*gemmarius sculptor*) from Rome. While some gem engravers and metalworkers were freeborn, many were freedmen or still enslaved. A graffito from Pompeii, meanwhile, provides firm evidence for the friendly

relations that might be expected between allied craftsmen: the *caelator* Priscus salutes the *gemmarius* Campanus. Guild regulations, not surprisingly, indicate that those who would have fashioned Seneca's tables, the *citrarii* and the *eborarii* (workers in citrus wood and in ivory), belonged to the same guild (Meiggs 1982, 286–291). Still, in most cases our craftsmen remain anonymous.

Iconography, Use, and Display

The imagery depicted in the luxury arts often parallels that in other media. Mythological scenes are prevalent, but genre and historical subjects also appear, as do personal and imperial portraits as well as animals, vegetation, and inanimate objects—often those associated with the wine god Dionysos, Bacchus to the Romans. The scenes and inscriptions on Roman luxury arts are frequently Greek, the language of high culture and status, like French in early modern Europe. Although rarely intended for broad public display, the luxury arts were paraded before their owners' peers. Figured silverware was not only used during banquets, but also exhibited on sideboards. It was even carried by military officers on campaign. Pliny mentions the governor of Lower Germany, Pompeius Paulinus, “son of a knight of Rome at Arles ... who had 12,000 pounds weight of silver plate with him when on service with an army confronted by tribes of the greatest ferocity” (*Natural History* 33.143). The spectacular Hildesheim Treasure now in Berlin, consisting of more than 70 silver objects assembled and buried in the first century CE and rediscovered in 1868, has, overoptimistically, been thought to derive from personal property of Augustus' general Quinctilius Varus, whom the Germans ambushed in 9 CE, or of one of his officers (Boetzkes and Stein 1997). Inscriptions suggest that other Roman silver vessels recovered in northern Europe were dedicated to local gods or gifted by Roman officials to local chieftains, some of whom may have adopted or imitated in some way Roman drinking practices (Babelon 1916; Müller 1994; Painter 2001, 15; Lapatin 2014).

Although engraved gemstones functioned as personal seals, they were employed on official documents and were sometimes mounted where they would be seen by others. The choice of iconography was often significant: Julius Caesar, a passionate collector of gems according to Suetonius (*Julius Caesar* 47), wore a ring with an intaglio of his divine ancestress *Venus Genetrix* (Dio Cassius 43.43), whose statue he erected in the Forum Julium; he also dedicated in her temple there a *daktyliotheke*, a cabinet of engraved gems, as his rival Pompey the Great had done in the temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline after capturing the collection of gems and precious stone vessels assembled by Mithradates, king of Pontus (Pliny, *Natural History* 37.12). Before Augustus commissioned Dioskourides to carve his seal ring with his portrait, he had two others: a sphinx, which he inherited from his mother—and which came to allude to his inscrutability; and a portrait of Alexander the Great.

Some objects, intended as gifts, whether up or down the social ladder, may have had an audience of one. Enjoyed in life, such items could eventually be dedicated in temples to demonstrate piety and simultaneously advertise status, or be passed to heirs or deposited in tombs. Produced at a scale considerably smaller than public monuments, their iconography is sometimes, but by no means uniformly, simple. Intended for close and prolonged inspection by

well-educated patrons, the imagery employed on luxury objects is often quite complex, allusive, ambiguous, and occasionally unique, and has rightly been called the visual counterpart of Hellenistic and Latin poetry, whether adulating a ruler, meditating on love, or exploring the wonders of the natural world (Henig 1983, 140; Prioux 2008).

Hierarchies of Value

Some objects, of course, were more desirable than others. Roman collectors prized old silver vessels decorated by Greek masters, and thus encouraged both imitators and forgers. Molds used to fashion silver vessels, or taken from them, could be employed to produce cheaper versions in terracotta. Bone could be substituted for ivory and glass for hard stones, whether clear or colored. The elder Pliny and other authors preserve recipes for fashioning faux pearls and dying stones to enhance their color.

A splendid variegated stone called *murrhina* (probably fluorite) was especially prized. Pliny (*Natural History* 37.18–22) reports that it first came to Rome in the wake of Pompey's eastern conquests and was increasingly sought after: even fragments of broken cups might be displayed. Petronius is said to have deliberately broken a murrhine ladle worth 300,000 sesterces so that it would not fall into the hands of Nero after his suicide. In similar circumstances Nero himself (who spent 1 million on a single murrhine bowl) smashed two crystal cups in order to punish his contemporaries (Pliny, *Natural History* 37.29). Rock crystal vessels of various sizes and shapes have been found throughout the Roman Empire, sometimes further enhanced by gilding, but fluorite vessels are much rarer survivals from antiquity ([Figure 17.1](#); Bühler 1973, 44–45, nos. 16–17; Williams 2004; Tressaud and Vickers 2007): a kantharos and a one-handled cup (likely intended to be double-handled) said to have been found together in a tomb in Cilicia early in the twentieth century are the best examples. Although the cup is decorated with grapes, vine leaves, and a bearded head, alternately identified as Dionysos or a satyr, both are less well carved than the finest of ancient stone vessels, such as the so-called Cup of the Ptolemies ([Figure 17.2](#); Bühler 1973, 45–47, no. 18; Gaborit-Chopin and Hamani 1995, 38–40, no. 11), a superbly crafted agate kantharos decorated with Dionysiac vessels, masks, and animals carved in high relief. Known since the Middle Ages, it was ascribed in 1644 to workshops laboring for the Egyptian king Ptolemy II, but is now dated to the first century BCE or CE. Between them, these three vessels convey both the beauty of the stones and the quality of the craftsmanship that captivated ancient collectors.



Figure 17.1 Two fluorite cups said to be from Cilicia, H. 15 and 9.7 cm. London, British Museum, GR 1971.0419.1 and 2003.12-2.1.

Photo: Kenneth Lapatin.



Figure 17.2 Agate kantharos (“Cup of the Ptolemies”), H. 8.4 cm. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des monnaies, médailles et antiques.

Photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource.

Gem Cutting

The cutting of both vessels and smaller seals from hard stones considered precious in antiquity (but today called semi-precious)—cornelian, jasper, agate, sardonyx, amethyst, chalcedony, and rock crystal being more commonly used than softer, more brittle fluorite—can be traced back to ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt. The craft was brought to perfection by the Greeks, Etruscans, and Phoenicians, who seem to have produced many of the objects consumed by Roman patrons in the late Republic and early Empire. While stone vessels were certainly the possessions of the elite, small gems engraved with figural devices were not the exclusive property of the wealthy, and tens of thousands, of quite varying quality, have been recovered from sites throughout the Roman Empire.

Whether the creation of Dioskourides or an anonymous craftsman working in northern Italy,

Britain, or Asia Minor, the process of engraving was essentially the same. Some stones, like cornelian, onyx, or jasper, could be obtained locally, while others, like amethyst, aquamarine, garnet, or peridot, had to be imported. Once ground to form a disk, oval, or other desired shape, the stones were ready to be engraved. Unlike modern carvers, who can use hardened steel tools with diamond tips set in electrically powered drills, ancient carvers employed variously shaped copper or iron bits terminating in discs, cones, wheels, and points, mounted on a hand-powered horizontal lathe. A slurry of oil mixed with powdered abrasive, usually corundum, was applied to the tips of these bits, and it was this abrasive slurry, rather than the softer metal, that actually cut the gems, most of which are approximately 7 on the Mohs scale of hardness, while corundum is 9 (diamond is 10; marble ranges from 3 to 5). Working largely by feel, as the slurry obscured direct observation, carvers cut their designs into the stone, eventually fashioning an *intaglio* (a modern term from the Italian *tagliare*, meaning “to cut”), a concave image in reverse, which, when pressed into some malleable material such as clay, wax, or plaster, produces an image in low relief. There is no evidence that ancient carvers used magnifying lenses, but many were likely near-sighted. Indeed, myopia is a genetic condition, and gem engraving, like so many crafts, seems to have been passed from father to son. Some gem carvers also seem to have applied their skills to cut dies for coins, a practice well attested in the Greek world (e.g., Zwierlein-Diehl 2007; Guiraud 1996; for individual carvers: Zwierlein-Diehl 2005; against lenses: Plantzos 1997).

Intaglios and Cameos

Intaglios were functional, used to sign and seal letters and other documents, as well as to mark the closure of doors of rooms, cupboards, or other containers holding valuables. Some, however, are so large or deeply undercut that they must have been fashioned purely for show. Cameos, invented only in the Hellenistic period, are essentially the reverse of intaglios, but were usually cut from banded, multilayered stones. Rather than cut away the stone within the image, creating an intaglio, the craftsman cut around the image, making a relief; by artfully exploiting differently colored layers of stones, the image was more immediately legible. Although more decorative than functional, cameos were occasionally employed as seals, as witnessed by impressions preserved in ancient archives. Sardonyx and banded agates were the preferred stones for ancient cameos. Their beautiful brown, orange, and yellow layers were often enhanced by heating and other chemical processes. Such stones, according to Pliny and other ancient authors, were imported from as far away as India and Arabia, but although some certainly did travel great distances, recent research has indicated that sources of banded agates closer to Rome in Thrace (present-day northern Greece, western Turkey, and southern Bulgaria) were exploited. It seems that ancient traders and craftsmen hid both the sources of their materials and the means by which they enhanced them in order to increase the value and allure of their products (Megow 1987; Schmidt in Platz-Horster 2008, 6–12).

One of the largest and most impressive ancient cameos to have survived to this day, the so-called Gemma Augustea ([Figure 10.8](#); cf. Holliday, [Chapter 10](#) this volume), was cut from a large sardonyx that was artificially treated to achieve two uniform color layers: white above

dark bluish-brown. Now broken at the edges, it originally depicted more than 25 figures disposed in two tiers. Although the precise dating and specific meaning of the cameo have been much debated by scholars, the overall significance of the object is clear: the elevation of the emperor and his house as the bringers of peace and prosperity—the *Pax Augusta*—through continued military effort, the triumph of Roman armies, and the pacification of barbarian peoples. Although carved in low relief, the cameo presents a wealth of detail: clothing, armor, weaponry, and other apparatus. Figures stand in a variety of poses, subtly overlapping and masterfully foreshortened. Scholars have recognized portraits in many of the figures, and the clear association of the cameo with the court of Augustus has encouraged its attribution to Dioskourides or his workshop (perhaps his son, Hyllos), but this is by no means certain. Nor is the ancient destination of the gem. To be sure, its visual language shares panegyric themes, dynastic ambitions, and allusions to a golden age with much Augustan art and literature. If, as suggested, it was carved ca. 12 CE to commemorate the victories of Livia's sons Tiberius and Drusus on the northern frontiers, their service to Augustus, and the establishment of the cult of Roma in the West, then it may have been a gift from Livia to the emperor. Yet several other interpretations are plausible: because Augustus resisted divine honors in the west, scholars have suggested that the gem may have been intended for a recipient in the provinces or an eastern client king, or was meant to be seen only by a select private audience as early as 12 BCE, or was fashioned after Augustus' death in 14 CE. In short, the ancient destination of the cameo remains uncertain (e.g., Doonan 1992; Pollini 1993; Zwierlein-Diehl and Bernhard-Walcher 2008, 98–123, 263–282, no. 6).

The cameo is first recorded only in a mid-thirteenth-century inventory of the treasury of the church of Saint Sernin, in Toulouse, France, where, brought from Constantinople, it probably served as the centerpiece of an ecclesiastical breastplate. The raising of the trophy in its lower register was likely read in a Christian interpretation as preparation for the Crucifixion, while Augustus and Roma enthroned might have been taken to be Christ and the Virgin Mary in majesty. Some 200 years later, the gem-collecting Renaissance Pope Paul II so desired the cameo that he offered the people of Toulouse 10,000 gold pieces and to construct a bridge over the river Garonne in exchange for the cameo, but was refused. In 1533 King Francis I of France appropriated the gem, but it disappeared in 1590 when the Huguenots plundered Fontainebleau. The cameo soon resurfaced in Venice, where it was purchased for 12,000 gold pieces by the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolph II (ruled 1576–1612). This rich history reflects not only the great value, prestige, and desirability of imperial cameos over the centuries, but also demonstrates how this luxury art appealed to and was utilized for political declarations by lofty rulers on account of its costly materials and superb craftsmanship (Lorz 2006; Zwierlein-Diehl 2007; Belozerskaya 2012).

Silver Plate

Silver plate was more widely distributed across different levels of Roman society than finely carved cameos, and silver vessels, although less durable than artifacts cut from hard stones, survive in large numbers. The Hildesheim Treasure was mentioned briefly earlier; other silver

hoards have been recovered elsewhere in northern Europe, as well as from houses and villas buried by the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius (e.g., Johns 1990 and 2010; Guzzo 2006; cf. [Figure 7.6](#)). Although individual cups or other silver items might be highly valued among the less wealthy or in distant provinces, well-to-do Romans employed different sets of silver for drinking, eating, and bathing: *argentum escarium*, *argentum potorium*, and *argentum blaneare*. A well-appointed home would have platters and plates, bowls for fruit, sauces, herbs, and other foods, as well as for fingers, egg cups, salt cellars, and vessels for pepper and other spices, not to mention candelabra, tables, and stands of various sorts and, of course, knives and spoons; drinking services included mixing bowls, pitchers for wine and water, ladles and strainers, and cups of various shapes; and for bathing pitchers and jugs, mirrors, caskets, and vials for perfumes and unguents were used. These items might be plain or decorated with incision, engraving, chasing, embossing, with or without gilding, enamel, or incrustation with inlays of hardstones or glass imitations. Some vessels, with high-relief insets, *emblemata*, must have been intended only for display (Pirzio Biroli Stefanelli 1991).

Most surviving silver seems to have been buried intentionally in troubled times and never recovered, but approximately 90 vessels, fragments, and two statuettes unearthed by chance in 1830 by a farmer near the town of Berthouville in Normandy were revealed by subsequent excavations to belong to the treasury of a sanctuary of Mercury, a major Gallo-Roman god, mentioned by ancient authors (Babelon 1916; Lapatin 2014). The two silver statuettes in the round represent Mercury holding his caduceus in one hand and money bag in the other, and many of the vessels, too, depict the god, sometimes with his mother, Maia. Quality varies, as does chronology. It seems that the earliest objects were made (and perhaps dedicated) in the first century CE, while others may have been produced as late as the late second or early third century. Several bear inscriptions indicating that they were dedications made to fulfill a vow. Some seem to have been made locally, perhaps even mass produced to be sold on site to pilgrims. Others were clearly imported, including eight of the highest quality, all of which were dedicated to *Mercurio Augusto* by the otherwise unknown Q. Domitius Tutus. Judging from their style, technique, and shape, these vessels may have been made in Italy in the first century, for they closely parallel objects excavated at Pompeii and other Vesuvian sites. Moreover, although dedicated to Mercury, they are decorated with unrelated imagery, depicting scenes from the Trojan War and the world of Dionysos. Tutus perhaps brought them to Gaul and dedicated them in a local sanctuary.

A pair of “Centaur Cups” from Berthouville decorated in high relief are among the finest examples of Roman silver that have survived ([Figure 17.3](#)). The shape, a broad deep bowl with vertical ring handles, is known as a *skyphos*, and can be traced back to ancient Greece. Roman examples survive in various materials in addition to silver: terracotta, glass, even obsidian. Each of the Berthouville cups was made of multiple elements joined together: two tripartite handles and the molded foot were cast, while the smooth interior lining and figured exterior shell were both fashioned from silver sheet. It is the quality of the exterior decoration, hammered from behind in *repoussé* with details chased and engraved from the front, that makes the cups so remarkable. (Chasing is using a tool to push or move the metal to a desired form without removing it; engraving is actually cutting away metal. Thus, engraved lines tend to be

sharper than chased ones.) Some details of the cups were also gilded. This was often done by the careful application of an amalgam of gold with mercury, which was vaporized when heated.



Figure 17.3 One of two “Centaur cups” from the Berthouville Treasure, silver, H. 11.6 cm, weight 1,641 gr. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des monnaies, médailles et antiques, 56.7.

Photo: T. Cracchiola courtesy Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des monnaies, médailles et antiques, Paris.

As their modern name indicates, these cups feature centaurs, but the composite creatures are far from alone. Nor do they engage in combat, as they do so often in other media. Here they appear as members of the retinue of Dionysos/Bacchus, the god of wine. Indeed, Dionysiac imagery is, as we might expect, a favorite theme on Roman drinking vessels. Both of the two cups from Berthouville (Roman silver vessels were often produced in pairs—for one should not drink alone) depict a male Centaur and Centauress. Each is surrounded by other exotic figures and paraphernalia. On one side of one of the cups, for example, two cupids flank a Centauress, who wears a garland of ivy, throws her head back, and beats a tympanum. The cupid behind her carries long-stemmed poppies while standing on a hydria, itself adorned with the figure of a mounted Amazon, and a basket. The other cupid in front of her blows a pair of pipes (*tibiae impares*). He stands on a fallen *krater* (mixing bowl), out of which a pantheress prances toward a snake rising out of a *cista mystica*. In front of this cupid is a satyr mask, while behind him is a pillar supporting a basket filled with fruit and a torch with a wreath and a sash. Amazingly, amid all this detail, comparable to that carved on the Cup of the Ptolemies, is still more, for reflected in the tympanum are reverse images of the cupid, *krater*, and pillar.

To understand the dense allusions of this scene, we must multiply it by four, taking in the other side of this cup and the two sides of its companion, which feature three other centaurs with additional musical instruments and masks, numerous vessels bearing still more images, and

representations of other exotic creatures such as a peacock and an infant dragon being fed the milk of a female satyr. There is not a single meaning to this rich iconography, but the different experiences of the four centaurs, young and old, male and female, some apparently enjoying the positive, ecstatic effects of wine, others suffering, presumably from having drunk too much, would simulate discussion among the mortals who drank from these cups. We must imagine them in the hands of Tutus and his guests at a banquet long before they were dedicated to Mercury, being admired and inspiring reflections on the power of wine, its mysterious ability to bring both pleasure and pain (Babelon 1916, 88–93, nos. 6–7, pls. 9–10; van de Grift 1984; Colonna in Lapatin 2014, 46–51).

Virgil, in his third *Eclogue* (3.35–47), writes of two pairs of cups carved from beechwood, the pastoral precursor to metal, both “made by the inspired Alcimedon” and adorned with images of Orpheus charming the trees and depictions of Hellenistic astronomers. Such allusions to Greek poetry and Hellenistic science speak to the cultural pretensions of well-to-do Romans. Parallel representations on surviving silver vessels often seem to derive from the Homeric epics, classical tragedians, or other ancient authors (Henig 1983, 142; Müller 1994; Wölfel 1996). The table talk of their owners, the complexity of such cups suggests, would have been more thoughtful than those of Petronius’ Trimalchio, who boorishly boasts of his collection of silver, valuing the weight of his vessels while garbling the identifications of the mythological figures depicted on them:

When it comes to silver, I’m a connoisseur. I have *skyphoi* as big as water jars, a hundred of them, more or less, showing how Cassandra killed her sons, and the dead boys lie there so naturally you’d think them alive. I have a bowl my patron left me on which Daedalus shuts Niobe up in the Trojan horse. And I have [the gladiators] Hermeros and Petraites fighting on cups, and they’re all heavy. I wouldn’t sell my knowledge of these things at any price.

(*Satyricon* 52)

Statues of Precious Materials

Ancient literary sources preserve numerous references to statuary of precious metals, but little survives other than statuettes (Vermeule 1974). A hollow gold bust of Septemius Severus from Ploutinoupolis in Thrace, however, is a remarkable example ([Figure 17.4](#)). It likely served as a portable *imago* of the emperor that could be carried by soldiers along with other legionary standards. The emperor is depicted wearing a *lorica plumata* (feather cuirass) with a central gorgoneion. The varied textures of the overlapping rows of feathers, smooth leather straps, and twisted ropework at the sleeves are all carefully distinguished. Iconographically, this bust deviates from the emperor’s official portrait types, combining small curls over his forehead present in his earliest marble portraits with the long split beard of later ones, thus eluding precise dating. A similar, slightly larger, hollow gold bust of an earlier emperor, probably Marcus Aurelius, and also likely intended to have been carried on a pole as a military standard, was excavated in late Roman debris inside an aqueduct near a temple at Aventicum (present-day Avenches, Switzerland: Riccardi 2002; Aillagon 2008, 82–83, 612, no. I.20).

Such items—meant to impress and still impressive today—were certainly far more common in antiquity than is suggested by their extremely low rate of survival.



Figure 17.4 Hollow bust of Septimius Severus from Ploutinoupolis in Thrace, gold, height c. 25 cm, weight 950 grams. Komotini, Archaeological Museum, inv. 207.

Photo: H.R. Goette.

More often preserved, but still rare, are individually carved elements of composite small-scale sculptures: draped bodies cut from semi-precious stones to which heads and limbs of chalcedony, amethyst, or ivory might be added. Pliny writes of a 16-inch-tall statuette of Nero wearing a cuirass carved of “jasper onyx” (probably chalcedony) and another of the Ptolemaic Queen Arsinoe I in green peridot from the Red Sea, said to be six feet tall and consecrated in a shrine dedicated to her (*Natural History* 37.118, 108). A smaller, finely carved torso of an anonymous man wearing a toga was cut from red and yellow Sicilian jasper ([Figure 17.5](#): Picón et al. 2007, 333, 482, no. 386; Galletti 2006, no. D 20; Padgett 1995, 6, no. 6). Holes drilled at the neck and elbows received the head and hands in some other material. Such works were not strictly mimetic, however, at least in terms of coloration. Heads of a variety of colored stones with cuttings at the neck indicate that they were intended for insertion into larger compositions. Many are identifiable as gods or members of the imperial house, and the statues to which they belonged may have been intended for worship in household *lararia* or given as gifts. Two portraits of Agrippina the younger, wife of the emperor Claudius and mother of Nero, in green chalcedony and amethyst bear witness to the high quality of such work ([Figure 17.6](#); Megow 1987, 40, 301, pls. 19–20, no. D33; Walker 2000, 187–188, no. 252; Galletti 2006, no. B10, cf. B9).



[Figure 17.5](#) Jasper togatus, H. 18.7 cm. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. 17.230.54.

Photo: Kenneth Lapatin.



Figure 17.6 Chalcedony bust of Agrippina Minor, H. 9 cm. London, British Museum, inv. 1907,0415.1 (Gem 3946).

Photo: Kenneth Lapatin.

Exotic stones were thought to have magical and mystical, as well as aesthetic and monetary properties; so did many organic materials. Ancient authors debated whether ivory was an elephant's tooth or a horn (it is the former), and considered it extremely valuable. Pliny (*Natural History* 37.204) calls it the most costly product found on land. In the Homeric epics, as in the Bible, it is employed as a metaphor for beauty and purity as well as extravagance, and the most famous and valuable statues of classical antiquity were the colossal chryselephantine figures (composite works of gold and ivory), such as those made by the Athenian sculptor Pheidias in the fifth century BCE. The Romans imitated Pheidias' *Zeus Olympios*, which was considered one of the Seven Wonders of the World, by commissioning a certain Apollonius to fashion a new gold and ivory statue of *Jupiter Optimus Maximus* for the Capitoline in 83 BCE. Two centuries later, Hadrian commissioned an even larger *Zeus* for the Olympieion at Athens (Lapatin 2001). We can reconstruct the general appearance of these statues from descriptions in ancient literature and from representations in other media, especially on coins. Valuable information about this composite technique, in which precious imported ivory was reserved for exposed flesh—faces, hands, and feet—while hair and drapery were gilded, is provided by the rare survival of individual ivory components, which also demonstrate the high quality of such works, unrivaled in other media.

A sandaled foot ([Figure 17.7](#); Lapatin 2001, 130–132; Picón et al. 2007, 362, 487, no. 420), now in New York but acquired in Rome, has been dated to the Augustan period due to the outstanding quality of its carving, such as the fine detail of the cuticles and bone structure of the toes, the fluttering laces of the sandal, and the low-relief acanthus scrollwork on the straps. The iconography of the wide *lingula* (tongue), however, is more closely paralleled by Antonine works. The personification of the river Nile, bearded and half-draped, sits cross-legged on a sphinx while two wingless putti hold a wreath above him. Above them is the bottom part of the curved tail of the Agathodaimon snake or Isis-Thermouthis. The foot is not broken, apart from some flaking of the ivory at the edge of the ankle, but rather has been cut to be joined to a larger whole by means of a square mortise. It is approximately half lifesize, but whether it originally belonged to the figure of an Egyptian god, such as Serapis, an emperor, or some other person with Egyptian connections, we cannot at present determine.



Figure 17.7 Ivory foot from a composite statue, L. 14.3 cm. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of John Marshall, 1925 (25.78.43).

Photo: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource, NY.

Luxury Furniture

Ivory was employed not only for composite statuary, but also for luxury furniture. The curule chair (*sella curulis*) of high magistrates and emperors had ivory legs, and couches were regularly decorated with figures of *erotes* and Dionysiac subjects carved in ivory, or bone, a cheaper substitute. Pliny mentions expensive dining couches inlaid with silver, gold, and tortoise shell, the invention of a certain Carvilius Pollio, “a man of prodigal habits and ingenius in inventing the refinements of luxury” (*Natural History* 9.39; 33.144). Bronze, copper, and enamel, too, were employed for the decoration of such items. A double-backed couch (*bisellium*) from Amiternum, about 80 miles east of Rome, is remarkable for the detail of its polychromatic metal inlays on its *fulcra* (head boards) representing vintage scenes of lively satyrs and maenads flanked by Bacchic finials in high relief, the maenads and donkeys crowned with ivy ([Figure 17.8](#); Pirzio Biroli Stefanelli 1990, 12–170, 262, no. 29, figs. 118–135). These are precisely the kinds of details described by Hyginus (*Fabulae* 274) and Juvenal (*Satire* 11.96–98). Luxurious bronze dining couches, *triclinia aerata*, imported to Rome in the aftermath of triumphs in the east in the early second century BCE, are mentioned

by various ancient authors. As time passed, such couches became more and more elaborate as consumers strove to distinguish themselves further with these markers of Hellenistic luxury, and the objects themselves came to be distributed more widely throughout the empire (Nichols 1979; Stern and Thimme 2007; Wallace Hadrill 2008: 422–435).



Figure 17.8 Fulcrum of a double-headed couch from Amiternum, bronze inlaid with copper and silver. Rome, Museo dei Conservatori, Centrale Montemartini, inv. 1074.

Photo: Araldo de Luca.

Amber

Amber—fossilized tree resin—was carved into appliqués and small vessels, as well as figurines, pendants, and rings. Because of its expense, Pliny considered its use an unjustifiable luxury (*Natural History* 37.42–50); a small amber figurine might cost more than several slaves. Statuettes depicting actors and other figures have been found at Pompeii and elsewhere, usually in tombs. Soft and easy to carve, amber holds details well, but is subject to disintegration with time. Various myths accounted for its origins, and its sources in the Baltic regions of northern Europe were sometimes misattributed to more exotic Syria or even India. Its electrostatic properties were likely considered magical, like many exotic stones, and amber was also thought to possess medicinal characteristics. It was prized by the Etruscans and imports seem to have increased during the reign of Tiberius, when northern trade routes became more secure following the pacification of the Danube regions. Aquileia, the Mediterranean terminus of such routes at the top of the Adriatic, seems to have been one of the principal centers of amber carving and is the source of many survivals, including a charming perfume pot decorated in high and low relief with vintaging cupids, a panther, and a wine cup ([Figure 17.9](#); Strong 1966a, 92–93, no. 114; Nava and Salerno 2007, 284, no. IV, 45; D’Ercole 2008).



Figure 17.9 Amber perfume pot said to be from Aquileia, c. 100–120 CE, H. 5.2 cm. London. British Museum, inv. 1866,0412.3 (Amber 114).

Photo: © Trustees of the British Museum.

Jewelry

Personal adornment in the form of jewelry took many forms—rings, bracelets, necklaces, earrings, and brooches, as well as anklets, body chains, hairnets, and pins—and frequently combined diverse materials and techniques. Such items, perhaps even more than other luxury arts, were crucial in the formation and expression of individual identity. The Vesuvian cities have provided a wealth of finds, and much jewelry has been recovered from tombs throughout the Empire. Styles and techniques developed over time, with later work tending to be more massive and elaborate than earlier objects.

Ancient literature is replete with descriptions of jewelry and proscriptions of its use. We also hear of garments woven with gold threads and pearls, *margaritae* in Latin as well as Greek, sewn to shoes and other clothing as well as breast plates and portraits. Only scraps of the former survive, but a stunning necklace from Pompeii combines gold, pearls, and emeralds ([Figure 17.10](#); Scatozza Höricht 1989; Pirzio Biroli Stefanelli 1992; D’Ambrosio and De Carolis 1997). Jewelry is also frequently represented in ancient painting, at Pompeii and in Romano-Egyptian mummy portraiture (D’Ambrosio et al. 2008; Walker 2000, 162–175). A woman named Isidora, immortalized in all her finery, wears earrings, necklaces, a wreath, and a hairpin, parallels of which survive in the archaeological record ([Figure 17.11](#); Lapatin and Wight 2010, 227).



Figure 17.10 Gold, pearl, and emerald necklace from Pompeii, L. 34.5 cm. Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. 113576.

Photo: Alfredo Dagli Orti/The Art Archive at Art Resource.

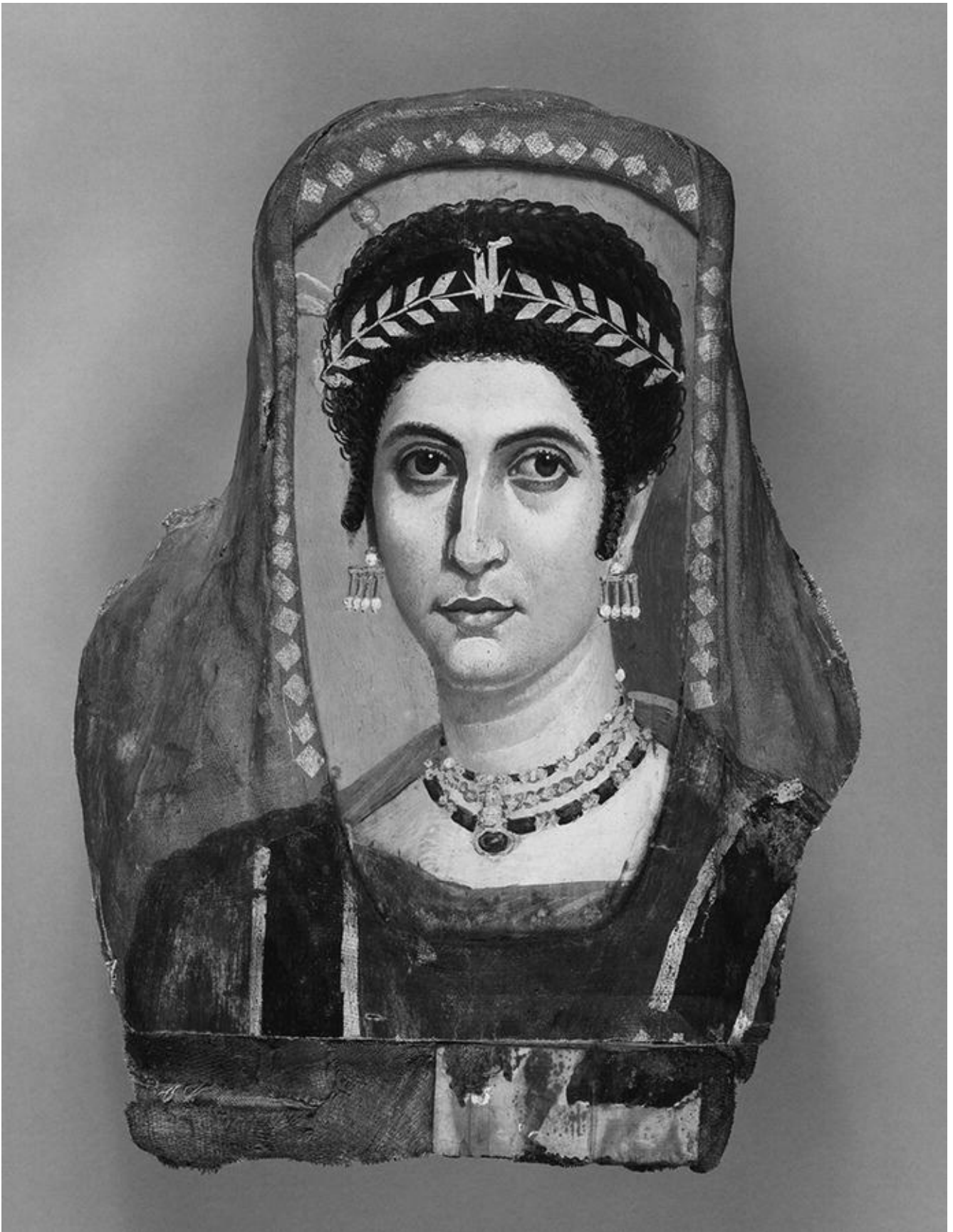


Figure 17.11 Mummy portrait of Isidora, linen, pigment, encaustic, and gold on wood, H. 48 cm, Malibu, J. Paul Getty Museum, inv. 81.AP.42.

Photo: J. Paul Getty Museum Villa Collection.

Gold Glass

Another medium for portraits utilizing precious materials, but not particularly expensive in itself, was gold glass: a thin sheet of gold foil, sometimes with added pigment, was applied to a sheet of glass, picked with a needle or another sharp object to produce the image, and then “sandwiched” with a second layer of glass. Rome’s early Christian catacombs have yielded hundreds of rather crude examples, but several portraits, apparently cut down from bowls that served as gifts on important ceremonial occasions, are of exceptional quality. These minutely realistic, highly refined images employ chiaroscuro effects and are among the finest examples of Roman portraiture. Some bear Greek inscriptions in a dialect particular to Alexandria, seemingly indicating their origins, while others appear to have been produced in the west. One of the most exquisite surviving examples is a likeness of a bearded man wearing a toga with a red stripe (the *toga praetexta* reserved for curule magistrates and members of certain priesthoods) and a wide horizontal *pallium* across the chest. His hollow cheeks, thinning hair, heavy eyelids, and the sculptural rendering of the face all evoke a strikingly distinctive personality ([Figure 17.12](#); Morey 1959, 41, no. 234; E. Laurenzi in La Rocca, Tortorella, and Ensoli 2009, 258, 309, no. VI.16).



Figure 17.12 Gold-glass portrait, with white and red pigment, cut down from a larger object, diam. 4.4 cm, Arezzo, Museo Archeologico Nazionale 14973.

Photo: Scala/Art Resource.

Conclusions

We do not know much about the owners of most of the specific artifacts illustrated in this chapter: not the man in the gold glass portrait (nor his family), nor Isidora, nor, apart from his role in dedicating silver vessels to Mercury near Berthouville, Quintus Domitius Tutus. While the Gemma Augustea may have been commissioned or owned by a member of the imperial family, that is not true of the couch from Amertinum nor the murrhine vessels from Cilicia. Pliny tells us that Caligula's wife Lollia Paulina wore pearls worth 40 million sesterces to a betrothal party (*Natural History* 9.117–119) and that emeralds, too, were valued among the elite (Nero used one to watch the gladiatorial games: *Natural History* 37.64), but these materials were also available to the anonymous Pompeian woman who owned the lovely gold, pearl, and emerald necklace mentioned earlier; and an agate vessel—not so exquisitely carved as the Cup of the Ptolemies—was found with another woman who tried, unsuccessfully, to escape death on the shores of Herculaneum (Fontanella 2009, 43).

The profusion of luxury arts serving different social strata throughout the Empire was not merely the result of trickle-down from above. Rather, as Andrew Wallace-Hadrill has observed:

Luxury bridged the gap opened by the dissonance between ascribed legal status and wealth. It flourished on the tension and competition between different social groups, the freeborn and the freed, the veteran farmer and the successful trader. It not only consumed wealth but generated it, raising the standards of material culture by a considerable margin, recycling surplus into the production of more goods, and spreading the pattern of enrichment to the provinces.

(Wallace-Hadrill 2008, 440)

Given the great social and political importance of luxury objects in the Roman world, as well as their superlative artistry, they merit the close attention and analysis that are regularly paid to bronze and marble statuary, wall painting, and architecture. Although physically small, the luxury arts formed a vital and resonant part of the Roman cultural landscape. They were of paramount importance to men and women both in the capital and further afield, from members of the imperial family to well-to-do citizens and even freed slaves with higher aspirations.

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

For general treatments of Roman luxury and Roman luxury arts, see, for example, Henig (1983), Dalby (2000), Weeber (2003 and 2006), Aßkamp, Brouwer, and Christiansen (2007), Lapatin (2008), Fontanella (2009), Zanda (2011), and Lapatin (2015).

For a convenient selection of ancient literary sources on Rome's conquests in English translation, see Pollitt (1983, 29–48).

For gems, vessels, and statuettes of hard stones, see Bühler (1973), Alcouffe (1984), Megow (1987), Gaborit-Chopin and Hamani (1995), Padgett (1995), Vickers (1996 and 1997), Galletti

(2006), Tressaud and Vickers (2007), Zwierlein-Diehl (2007), Platz-Horster (2008), Zwierlein-Diehl and Bernhard-Walcher (2008), Venturelli (2009), and Belozerskaya (2012).

For gold and silver plate, see, for example, Babelon (1916), Simon (1966), Strong (1966b), Kent and Painter (1977), Oliver (1977), Baratte (1986), Baratte and Painter (1989), Johns (1990 and 2010), Pirzio Biroli Stefanelli (1991), Baratte (1997), Boetzkes and Stein (1997), Painter (2001), Guzzo (2006), and Lapatin (2014).

For ivory, see, for example, Lapatin (2001) and Stern and Thimme (2007).

For amber, see Strong (1966a), Grimaldi (1996), Nava and Salerno (2007), D’Ercole (2008), and Causey (2012).

For jewellery, see Pfeiler (1970), Higgins (1980), Scatozza Höricht (1989), Pirzio Biroli Stefanelli (1992), D’Ambrosio and De Carolis (1997), Walker (2000, 162–175), and D’Ambrosio et al. (2008).

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CHAPTER 18

Roman Architecture as Art?

Edmund Thomas

The most influential English-language authority on Roman architecture in the last hundred years consistently emphasized how Roman builders were preoccupied above all with practical solutions to practical problems (Ward-Perkins 1973, 51). In such a framework, modern scholars have struggled to consider the empirical activity of architecture as an art on the level of the finer, representational arts. The archaeological remains of Roman buildings seemed to make that enterprise yet more difficult. Detached from the allure provided by architecture's sister arts, how can the rough and disordered remains of brick and rubble in ancient sites be regarded in the same light as a marble statue, a wall painting, or even a mosaic? Such attitudes have a long history. In the eighteenth century architecture was relegated to "the mechanical arts," defined by utility, and excluded from a higher aesthetic group of "fine arts" characterized by pleasure (Thomas 2014, 37–39). This opposition goes back to antiquity, in particular Horace's *Ars Poetica*, yet it was disputed to which of these groups architecture belonged. Since Plato, it had been acknowledged to be a practical art oriented to a goal, like weaving, ship-building, or medicine (Balaban 2007).

There was some room for doubt among Romans whether to regard architecture as a higher art form. As the later architect Sir John Soane keenly noted, the rhetorician Quintilian disposed of the casuistic argument that everything that is perfected by art originates in nature and thus that "we may deny architecture to be an art, because, in early ages, they built cottages without art" (Guthrie 1805, 123; Quintilian, *Institutes of Oratory* 2.17.10: *nec fabrica sit ars (casas enim primi illi sine arte fecerunt)*). Implicit in Quintilian's reasoning is the distinction between a rudimentary kind of building (functional cottages in which to live) that comes from nature, and an art of architecture that is established then by rules and training. Indeed, no one could doubt that such a characterization of architecture, as of rhetoric, would meet the definitions of "arts" that had been proposed: acting by a method (*via*) and order (*ordo*); or "consisting of rules agreeing and exercised together to a useful end of life" (*constare ex perceptionibus consentientibus et coexercitatis ad finem utilem uitae*). This passage is very close to a place in Vitruvius' second book, where he describes how the civilizing process emerged out of the beginnings of architecture as men used their intellectual capacities to master the arts. Vitruvius even places architecture at the head of a gradual progression, starting with the construction of buildings and culminating in other arts and disciplines (*On Architecture* 2.1.6). This in turn helped architecture to develop from a simply practical need into an art form enhancing quality of life:

Then, equipping themselves in spirit and looking ahead with higher conceptions born from the variety of arts, they began to execute not huts, but even houses, with foundations, walls constructed of brick or stone, and roofs of timber or tile; and then from the observation of their practices they advanced from vague and uncertain thoughts to clear principles of modularity. After they recognized that nature had generated ample supplies of timber and that she had provided plentiful resources for buildings, they cultivated them by careful management and adorned the elegance of their lives, already enhanced by the arts, with pleasures.

(2.1.7, author's translation)

Thus, like other arts, architecture shared intellectual principles (*rationes*), which offered an objective basis for aesthetic criteria (Courrént 2011, 78).

Quintilian's own suggestion that an art should consist of theory (*inspectio*) and practice (*exercitatio*; *Institutes of Oratory* 2.17.42; Guthrie 1805, vol. 2, 129–130) is strikingly similar to Vitruvius' own pair of *fabrica* and *ratiocinatio* as the sources of architecture (*On Architecture*. 1.1.1). So for Soane, another passage in Guthrie's translation seemed to settle the matter:

is there a man so void, I would not say of erudition, but of the knowledge of the world, as not to know that building, weaving, and the making of vessels out of clay, is an art? And can he imagine that rhetoric, the most sublime, the most beautiful perfection that exists, was brought, without an art, to the degree of excellency it now has?

(Guthrie 1805, 121; cf. Watkin 1996, 187)

However, where the English translation separates the thought to form two independent questions, the periodic Latin original is rather less complimentary to architecture:

nam quis est adeo non ab eruditione modo sed a sensu remotus hominis ut fabricandi quidem et texendi et luto uasa ducendi artem putet, rhetoricen autem maximum ac pulcherrimum, ut supra diximus, opus in tam sublime fastigium existimet sine arte uenisse? (2.17.3–4)

for who is so removed both from erudition and from human experience that he thinks there is an art even (*quidem*) of building and weaving and making vases from clay, but reckons that rhetoric, the greatest and most beautiful work as we have said above, came to such height of sublimity without art?

Quintilian has clearly chosen the examples of building, weaving, and pottery to establish a contrast with rhetoric; the *quidem* makes the rhetorical point clear: “if *even* building, weaving and pottery are considered arts, how can one possibly imagine that rhetoric has no art?” In other words, while Soane was reassured by his reading of Guthrie's translation to find evidence that architecture was indeed an art, a closer reading of Quintilian's Latin text indicates that the rhetorician imagined architecture, along with weaving and pottery, among the lowest activities that could be called “arts.”

It is well known that Vitruvius' treatise aimed to throw off this lowly quality and to make

architectura a higher or “liberal” art that depended on the mastery of a wide range of theoretical as well as practical knowledge (Rowland and Howe 1999, 13; Aiello 2007); indeed, by the Late Empire it was understood that it was not merely passed on within a family from father to son, like other similar professions, but could be acquired by others on the basis of their study of the “liberal arts” (*liberales litterae*; *Codex Theodosianus* 13.4.1), suggesting a degree of “professional mobility” (Aiello 2006, 915). On the other hand, the banausic, or untrained, element in architecture is evident even in Vitruvius’ language: the differentiation between *fabrica* on its own and the higher *architectura*, which is achieved with the addition of intellectual inquiry (*rationatio*), thus resembles Pevsner’s famous and much-contested distinction between “architecture” and “building” (Pevsner 1943). However, the *architecti* trained on practical engineering schemes in the Roman army and the new colonial towns of Caesar and Augustus might have had a hard job of convincing elites that theirs was an art like painting or sculpture. Outside the cities of Magna Graecia, including Pompeii, where the architect had sufficient cachet to have his name inscribed on official building dedications, the practitioners designing Roman public buildings rarely had the opportunity to carve their name on their work as a sculptor would sometimes do. Even in the private domain, where the employment of a Greek architect was as prestigious as the acquisition of a sculpture by a Greek artist, the architect had little scope for self-fashioning. A Greek *arkhitekton* cleverly inscribed his name in Greek into a shell mosaic of a grotto at Segni (Cifarelli 1995). Yet the Greek architects of the Temple of Jupiter Stator in the Porticus Octaviae at Rome had become so forgotten that a story spread that the images of a lizard (Greek *saura*) and a frog (*batrachos*) carved into the bases of the temple’s Ionic columns were a signature rebus of the names of the temple’s architects, Spartans by the names of Batrachus and Saura (Pliny, *Natural History* 36.42). By contrast, Roman architects, whether of free or, more commonly, freed status, were usually described as simple “builders” (*fabri*), a word used for any practitioner of handicraft from a blacksmith to a silversmith. Not that they were for long without a voice. The (re-)foundation of the association of timber workers (*collegium fabrum tignariorum*) in Rome in 7 BCE (Pearse 1976–77; Panciera 1981), at the time of Augustus’ administrative reorganization of the city, was a tacit acknowledgment of the part they had played during the city’s physical transformation during his reign. It was two or more generations before similar bodies were established analogously in other cities (Liu 2008, 65); one of the most influential must have been that at Ostia, which, after the enormous expansion of the town in the second century, had some 350 members (DeLaine 2003, 727). However, these were economic and social organizations that were defined in other ways than through a claim to create high art. Of much higher status than individual “builders” or even “architects” (and considerably wealthier than either) were the contractors (*redemptores*; Thomas 2008, 852) and the equestrian officials called *praefecti fabrum*, “supervisors of the builders” (Sander 1962; Saddington 1985; Welch 1995; Cerva 2000). So Lucius Cornelius, the official “architect of the censor” attached to Quintus Lutatius Catulus, was also *praefectus fabrum* (Molisani 1971). Some have claimed that Vitruvius too was related to, or even possibly identified with, Mamurra, the influential *praefectus fabrum* of Julius Caesar (Giglioli 1908; Thielscher 1961; cf. Ruffel and Soubiran 1962).

Whatever the pretensions or successes of individual architects, it remained the case that not all

buildings qualified as “architecture,” but where the boundaries lay was contested. To put it differently, because of its problematic nature as a constructed concept, “architecture” in the Roman world deserves to be put within quotation marks as much as “Art.” Yet this raises the further questions of whether and why such “architecture” might also in its own right merit the description as “Art”; in other words, high art. For Soane, Quintilian seemed to demonstrate that “architecture is an art,” implying that it was comparable to the fine arts, by his remark that the “art of architecture consists of the effect which the perfection of a work has upon the eye” (Watkin 1996, 187). However, here he changed Guthrie’s translation from “Other arts” to “The art of architecture,” where Quintilian originally had painting particularly in mind (Guthrie 1805, 130; Quintilian, *Institutes of Oratory* 2.18.2). Quintilian’s view was typical of surviving texts on ancient aesthetics, in which works of fine art were the principal objects of visual focus. In that sense, architecture merely provided the frame and was in some sense elevated by reflected glory from the other works of art that it contained. The introduction in Republican Rome of marble temples like that of Jupiter Stator, which for Vitruvius represented the height of the art of architecture, came about largely in order to provide a more suitable environment to house the new Greek marble sculptures than the old Roman shrines with terracotta ornament. As Vitruvius argued (*On Architecture* 3.3.3), the spacing of columns in temple porticos should be wide enough to offer a view of the cult statue. The design of Republican houses in Pompeii was heightened to show off exceptional works of mosaic, like the depiction of “Alexander at the Battle of Issus” in the House of the Faun, or extraordinary mural and panel paintings. Layouts were planned to create lines of sight so that a statue or a painting was brought into focus through passages or openings, framed by architectural features (Drerup 1959). The *coup de grâce* of Vitruvius’ basilica at Fanum was the apsidal *aedes Augusta* and the imperial statuary that, on the basis of similar structures in Italy and Greece, it would probably have contained (Scotton 1997, 244–267; Saliou 2009, 150–154). In this way, architecture could be considered a shell for art rather than a work of art in itself. The sculptures brought to temples, villas, and public buildings were the real object of display.

Yet to see architecture in this way as simply the frame for other works of art may be unduly limited. To see the apse of Vitruvius’ basilica in this way would be to neglect its identity as a new kind of spatial configuration independent of the sculptures it contained, an architectural innovation for enclosing sacred images that can also be seen in the near-contemporary Temple of Venus Genetrix in the Forum Iulium. Still, even in terms of the relation of a building to sculptures, a more positive perspective might hold that architecture was the union of arts and that its special achievement was in bringing together the works of other arts into a visually effective environment. This is the view of the biographer Plutarch, who presents Pericles’ construction of temples on the Acropolis as a gathering of artists of all kinds to build the Parthenon and the other “Periclean” works at Athens:

To those at the prime of life and with physical strength his military expeditions supplied abundant resources from the common funds, but he also wanted the untrained, banausic masses neither to be without a share in the revenues at all nor to receive one for laziness and idleness; so he put forward to the Assembly grand construction enterprises and multi-art proposals for long-term projects, in order that the home-bound might have as much a pretext for getting a share of and benefit from the public wealth as sailors, guards, and active soldiers. The materials were stone, bronze, ivory, gold, ebony, and cypress-wood; and the arts working with and refining these materials were carpenters, sculptors, bronze-smiths, stonemasons, gilders and ivory workers, painters, embroiderers, embossers, as well as the people fetching and transporting the materials, by sea merchants, sailors, and ship's captains and by land wagon-makers, trainers of yoked animals, drivers, rope-makers, linen-weavers, leather-cutters, road-builders, and miners. Each art, like a general with his personal army, had its own unskilled and untrained masses becoming an instrument and subordinate body, so that for practically every age-group and every physical category the needs of the project distributed and dispersed the city's resources.

(Plutarch, *Pericles* 12.5–7, author's translation)

Plutarch's description of the achievement of the Periclean building program tells us less about the circumstances of the fifth century BCE than about contemporary Roman perceptions of large-scale construction projects: as the work of almost military ranks of architects, builders, and other artists like those who supposedly accompanied Hadrian on his journeys across the Empire, building and rebuilding wherever he went (*Pericles* 14.4–5). Architecture was what brought this motley band together; and in an individual Roman building one could see all their products. In private houses at Pompeii and the later imperial palace at Rome paintings, sculptures, bronze and gilt furnishings, mosaics, stuccos, embroidered hangings, and ivories were assembled within an architectural context. At another place, Soane noted that architecture, like rhetoric, was “an art without limits.” Soane also noted Cicero's account of rhetoric in *On the Orator*, that, while other arts could “exist independently of another,” Eloquence “hath no determin'd Limits within which it can be bound;” to this Soane added in the margin: “Architecture” (Watkin 1996, 186).

However, if later architects could claim that their mission was to produce a composite of different minor arts, it is by no means clear that their ancient predecessors had the same holistic view. The accounts of Periclean and Hadrianic building attribute this gathering of arts not to the architect, but to the patron. Even Vitruvius, who gives architecture a universal competence, focuses mostly on matters of structure and design; his section on pigments offers little in the way of pictorial principles or aesthetics. Painted and sculptural elements do not play the same role in his architectural theory as they might later for Robert Adam or David Chipperfield.

The art that architecture particularly harnessed to its own benefit was sculpture. The creation by stone carvers and marble workers of architecture's own particular art, the Classical Orders and their accompanying decoration, facilitated the integration of architecture with other arts. Architectural ornament was the perfection of sculptural form, and its products in Roman public

buildings reveal this clearly. In the last years of the Republic the Orders developed with particular richness, inspired by late Hellenistic originality and aided by the availability of marble, but also encouraged conceptually by the growing mental separation since the Hellenistic period between the structural core of a building and its surface ornament (Hesberg 1996, 274–275). Under Augustus this tendency reached its apogee. The precinct wall of the Ara Pacis Augustae of Luna marble was embellished not only with figure panels and procession reliefs, but, below that, with a sumptuous zone of acanthus decoration, botanically diverse and incorporating birds and animals between the plant leaves and tendrils ([Figures 2.4](#) and [10.4–10.5](#); cf. Hölscher, [Chapter 2](#), and Holliday, [Chapter 10](#), this volume). The acanthus became a distinguishing mark of the new imperial order, both in the plant scrolls of the friezes of temples and public buildings and in the new standardized format of Corinthian capitals. A composite form of capital was devised that brought together elements of the Corinthian and Ionic orders and would become characteristic of imperial arches at Rome and in the provinces. The use of the drill in place of the chisel from the later first century not only quickened the pace of production of architectural ornament, but enabled architects to exploit dramatic effects of light and shadow. Capitals, friezes, and coffering were embellished to include masks and figures in what had previously been a non-figurative art. The “School of Aphrodisias” created the most striking ornamental works: pilasters and door frames of Proconnesian and Docimian marble carved with “peopled scrolls” concealing minuscule creatures within its make-believe plant tendrils. In some cases objects of “high art” were even incorporated into the architectural orders: a figured capital from the frigidarium of the Baths of Caracalla contains beneath its abacus a miniature replica of the colossal “Farnese Hercules,” which stood in the same hall (Mercklin 1962, 158–159, no. 385a, figs. 751–753).

The dominance and exuberance of the vocabulary of classical architecture had such a hold over building in Europe and its colonies that its collaboration with the fine arts of sculpture and painting was assured for centuries. Only recently has this relationship been questioned. Joseph Rykwert has lamented the gradual separation of architecture over the past 250 years from what were once called the other arts. He scoffs at the feeble rule reinstated in modern France that 1 percent of costs on public buildings should be spent on “works of art,” and excoriates those architects who demand exemption from it on the grounds that their building is the “work of art,” just as Le Corbusier once admonished the sculptor Jacques Lipschitz that “*C’est le mur lui-même qui est l’oeuvre d’art!*” (“It is the wall itself that is the work of art”: Rykwert 2008, 14, 377n16). Yet ancient architecture too, like other arts, could stand on its own, offering visual effects to delight the viewer. The immaculate drafting of a circuit wall like the outer face of Hadrian’s Library in Athens ([Figure 18.1](#)) needed no sculptor’s relief to make it artful. The stylobate of the Parthenon is well known for the refinement of its faint upward arc to produce an ideally level sagging impression from a distance, but the curvature of Roman buildings could be hardly less subtle. The upper cornice of the Library of Celsus at Ephesus ([Figure 24.9](#); cf. Smith, [Chapter 24](#), this volume) followed a slight upward curve to produce an optimum visual effect (Hüber 1984 and 1999). In the modern era from 1850, architectural critics have addressed the question of how to read a building’s underlying structure from what can be seen, metal frames encased in stone facings, arousing concerns with visible and invisible structure, “sham” buildings and “morality,” scale and proportion

(indicated by clues of illusory size; Rykwert 2008, 285–288). Similarly, there was no greater deception than the attachment of columnar orders to the outer surface of the Theatre of Marcellus and the Colosseum, which appears to suggest a trabeated mode of construction, but masks a vaulted structure enabled by the massed aggregate of concrete, reflecting the conceptual division that now existed between a building's structure and its ornament (Hesberg 1996, 275). The ancient criterion of “harmonious rhythm” (*eurythmia*) and the desire of the eyes to pursue attractive forms, like a lover, led Roman architects to “flatter its pleasure” (*blandimur voluptati*) by altering the proportional arrangements of parts required by true commensurability (*symmetria*) in order to avoid an unattractive appearance (Vitruvius, *On Architecture* 3.3.13; 1.2.3).



Figure 18.1 Athens, Library of Hadrian, c. 130 CE. Detail of the northwest façade.

Photo: Edmund Thomas.

Architecture, however, is not simply an art for the eye. It is built to be experienced by the body moving through space. Sculpture too is an art of light, but architecture involves not only the light cast on one spot, but its shifting patterns as the user moves around a building. As Le Corbusier famously wrote, architecture is “the masterly, correct and magnificent play of masses brought together in light” (Le Corbusier 1946, 31). While sculpture is an art of shaping material, architecture is *an art of shaping space* concerned with the interaction between solid and void and, on a larger scale, the landscaping of nature. The work of architects and contractors was first and foremost the erection and creation of height, as their funerary

monuments in particular illustrated, from the legendary accumulation of pyramids in the Tomb of Lars Porsenna at Clusium (Chiusi) described by Varro (Pliny, *Natural History* 36.19.91–93) to the tower tombs of Italy, North Africa, and Syria, and the suggestive reliefs of the Haterii tomb in Rome, an art that, like the classical orders, relentlessly led the eye upwards as it searches for beauty (Vitruvius, *On Architecture* 3.3.13). Yet beyond that it also involved the construction of shape; the securing of impregnability and stability, not least in the arts of fortification, but also in the terraced structures of temples and baths; the demonstration of proportion, harmony, and scale; working with color, light, and shade; the capturing and modeling of space as perceived through light; the play with texture and materials; and, most of all, the effective use of site. The history of Roman buildings shows how all of these effects could be artfully achieved, and there are sufficient indications from surviving ancient texts that in antiquity too they were regarded as “art.”

Setting, Staging, Shaping Space

The preoccupation with creating a dramatic setting was evident since at least the Archaic period in the vast Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus on the Capitoline Hill in Rome, dedicated, on traditional chronologies, in the first year of the Republic. The sheer and rough-hewn walls of its enormous terrace overhung the narrow uphill approach from the Forum along the Clivus Capitolinus. However, the last century of the Republic saw a new daring and a “baroque” extension of previously more static forms. Its first, most impressive demonstration was outside the Roman domain, where around 120 BCE the allied city of Praeneste, a rival and neighbor of Rome since at least the seventh century, erected one of the most audacious works of architecture yet conceived, the like of which had not at that point been seen at Rome itself. The sanctuary of Fortuna Primigenia consisted of a succession of terraces linked by diagonal ramps and staircases, punctuated by exedras and platforms, and leading the eye theatrically to the round temple at the peak of this vast ascending “pyramid.” The different levels were marked by the columnar orders, with Tuscan Doric below, Ionic in the middle, and Italo-Corinthian for the tholos at the top, a sequence that has been interpreted as both an ideological statement of its hierarchical society by a city fiercely independent of Rome in a demonstration of “Counter-architecture” (*Gegenarchitektur*; Ley and Struss 1982) and a form of “cultural capital,” constructed by a local elite seeking political participation in Rome (Rous 2010, 145–153). Such constructions had become possible because of the resilience of a recently discovered material known to us as *pozzolana*, a porous, volcanic rock best found around Puteoli (Pozzuoli) in Campania whose structural properties were lauded by Vitruvius a century later (*On Architecture* 2.8). It was this architectural achievement and that of similar terrace sanctuaries at Tivoli and Terracina that Catulus’ architect Cornelius sought to emulate in Rome (Molisani 1971). The two-story arcaded terrace that today is known as the “Tabularium,” dignified with attached columnar orders, was erected to support a major rebuilding of the Capitoline Temple initiated by Sulla after the building was damaged in a fire in 83 BCE, and continued by his supporter Catulus, who dedicated the substructure five years later. The Clivus Capitolinus was rebuilt as a ramp ascending toward the new temple at the summit, in which marble columns looted from the Olympieion in Athens were reused (Pliny,

Natural History 36.45). It was this temple that was standing when Cicero signaled the beauty of its pediment, making it clear at the start of this excerpt that he regarded this as falling within the domain of “art”:

let us turn from natural objects, and *cast our eyes on those of art*; what is so necessary in a ship as the sides, the hold, the prow, the stern, the yards, the sails, the masts? which yet have so much beauty in their appearance, that they seem to have been invented not for safety only, but also for the delight afforded by the spectacle. Pillars support temples and porticoes, and yet have not more of utility than of dignity. It was not regard to beauty, but necessity, that contrived the pediment of the Capitol, and other buildings; for when a plan was contemplated by which the water might run off from each side of the roof, the dignity of the pediment was added to the utility of the temple; but in such a manner, that should the Capitol be built in heaven, where no rain can fall, it would appear to have no dignity without the pediment.

(Cicero, *On the Orator* 3.180, translated by J.S. Watson, adapted)

Mass and Volume

The solidity of the aggregate of materials that made up Roman concrete gave the resulting buildings a massive quality. Its watertight resilience was particularly exploited for underwater harbor structures, both in Italy and in overseas imitations like Herodian Caesarea, giving rise to a bulk that alienated ancient as well as modern viewers (Horace, *Odes* 3.1.33–36). In the tall gateway of Augustan Turin (Colonia Julia Augusta Taurinorum), its concrete structure was masked by a fired-brick facing that not only held the rubble core in place, but provided the basis for a more ornamental façade, embellished with columnar orders in brick and plastered white to offer a more attractive frontage. Even in works of traditional cut stone, mass in itself was no criterion of artistic worth, as it is often regarded today. The “Pont du Gard” in southern France, which was constructed of well-cut local limestone blocks bound together with mortar to bring water to the Augustan colony of Nemausus (Nîmes), was quite as stunning as any sculpture, but in addition imposingly reshaped the landscape (Espérandieu 1934; O’Connor 1993; Paillet 2005). Its three rows of arches provide stability as they cross the river bed almost 50 meters below. Yet this unparalleled work of ancient engineering and its gigantic presence in the remote hinterland of the colony passed barely noticed, concealed from public view 20 kilometers northeast of the city and several kilometers from the principal road routes between Nîmes and Arles and between Arles and Orange.

By contrast, no visitor to Rome could miss the Flavian Amphitheater, popularly known as the Colosseum, a monstrous mass (*moles*) constructed by Vespasian in the city center and dedicated by Titus in 80 CE as a visual manifestation of the Flavians’ strength in crushing the people of Judaea (Millar 2005). However, despite the appearance of the squared stone exterior, this mass was the consequence of a vaulted concrete structure. From the earlier barrel vaults of the second century BCE that had emerged as simple extensions of the round-headed arch developed structures capable of supporting the vast ring of seating. So, while the amphitheater’s inner structure was artfully disguised by the exterior orders in travertine and its

barrel-vaulted staircases presented a front of cut stone voussoirs, the visitor encountered an altogether different experience inside, a world where volume mattered more than surface. The interior demonstrated the architecture of volume, sustained by a complex vaulted substructure, the solidity of travertine piers supporting an accumulated aggregate of concrete (Lancaster 2005b).

In its insistence despite its modern core on the traditional values of cut stone, the Flavian Amphitheater was a conservative building. Roman architecture had already started to evolve in new directions. As the earlier barrel vaults had developed during the second century BCE as an extension of the round-headed arch, so in the following century the cross-vault emerged out of the crossing of two barrel vaults at right angles. Structurally more resilient and economically more efficient, the cross-vault also provided a more capacious envelope for enclosed internal spaces. Nevertheless, its most far-reaching legacy was aesthetic. By the Trajanic period the experience and growing competence in constructing vaulted forms allowed the reduplication of simple units to create functional terrace structures and a wide range of commercial and utilitarian buildings. From Trajan's "Markets" to the harbor structures at Ostia, this was structural engineering whose artistic value lay perhaps only in its simple forms and sheer presence. Yet when the individual vaulted units were given their own character, spaces linked together at different heights, affording new possibilities for composition and lighting, the resulting variety of shape and internal complexity produced volumes that could be considered as "art" (MacDonald 1982/1986, 170). In time, the center of Roman architects' attentions became less the exterior dressing than the inner envelope of space, and the volumetric effects of the new materials engendered a sensory and emotional response. Both the enclosure of space and the artistic display of materials are celebrated in Statius' poetic account of the Palace of Domitian:

That structure spreads immense, and the reach of its giant hall,
More open than a field and holding in its embrace
More space than the sky, is only outdone by its lord: he fills
The happy home with his mighty spirit. Here stone competes
With stone, Numidian yellow rivaled by Phrygian purple,
Granite from Egypt, blushing marbles, and sea-green stone;
White slabs of Luna are relegated to the bases of columns.

(Occasional Poems, 4.2.23–29)

Material and Texture

It is hard to imagine that contemporary Romans could have been blind to the diverse effects of texture that resulted from the diverse materials used to construct the buildings of their city. The rough exterior fire wall of the Forum Augustum, presenting undressed blocks of tuff, made a striking contrast with its marbled interior (Zanker 1987). Indeed, the unique effects of unworked travertine, or rustication, presented in the half-columns beside the arched gateway that carried the Claudian aqueduct over the Via Praenestina and also characterized the

buildings of Claudius' new harbor at Ostia (Coates-Stephens 2004, 44–46; Liljenstolpe 2000–2001) seem almost to have been a deliberate affectation in polemical response to the sheen of colored marbles and gilding that his predecessor Gaius had favored; that the same treatment was given to the basement supporting the temple dedicated to Claudius after his death may suggest that his contemporaries too viewed this as a distinctive and novel feature of his buildings, just as they later remarked on his “new kind of face” (Seneca, *The Pumpkinification of the Divine Claudius* 5). Elsewhere there is evidence that the artisans of Roman public buildings applied deliberate gradations in texture between different sides of a building, as if to an artifact. Thus, the rear outer wall of the Library of Hadrian at Athens is rusticated in such a way that around the unworked surface of each block the margins are carefully smoothed, or drafted, while at the front the center of the blocks are also worked to a beautiful finish.

Furthermore, this façade is screened by a line of green-veined cipollino marble columns on cipollino pedestals, which is attached to the wall by ressauts projecting from the wall as if from a colonnade, a device seen at Rome some years earlier on the Forum of Nerva initiated by Domitian. The introduction of polychromatic marbles to the repertoire of Roman builders from the second century and in particular abundance from the later first century CE produced dramatic effects of color and contrast, as architectural sculptors crafted building ornament from multiple rich materials. The pilaster capitals of the lower interior order of the Pantheon were of a rich yellow Numidian marble. The Temple of Antoninus and Faustina is fronted not by columns of white marble, as was the norm since Augustus, or of granite, as occurred after the opening under Claudius of the Mons Claudianus quarries in the Egyptian southern desert, but with the green vein of cipollino marble. The mottled purple-white texture of Phrygian marble from Docimium (*pavonazzetto*) and the variegated black-red hues of “Lucullan marble” (*africano*) from Teos made them ideally suited for the illusionistic and luminous effects of architectural display in the Antonine and Severan periods, and especially for the rarefied virtuosity of spirally fluted columns (Fano Santi 1993). One example of the latter, which may have come from a building in the Gardens of Sallust in Rome, was even created, like a precious artifact, from the sinuous incandescence of Egyptian onyx (Norci Cagiano de Azevedo 1993).

Geometry and Design

The traditional focus on exterior order and proportion was the result of the strong emphasis of architects' education on geometry (Vitruvius, *On Architecture* 1.1.4). Mathematics had long advanced beyond the arithmetical principle of commensurability (*symmetria*), where every dimension could be expressed as a finite number of indivisible units; architecture was now founded on geometric considerations, based on incommensurable ratios and irrational numbers. A more pressing ideal in achieving architectural beauty was *eurythmia*, which required the adjustment of mathematical systems of proportion to suit the eye (Wilson Jones 2000, 43). In the Augustan period the Corinthian order attained precision in the naturalism of the acanthus leaves and exactitude and balance in its proportions. This perfection of design is best seen today in the architectural ornament of the beautifully preserved temple at Nîmes

(Nemausus) known as the Maison Carrée ([Figure 18.2](#)). The whole entablature, modeled on the Augustan temples of Rome itself, was richly embellished. The cornice was elaborated by an exuberant, naturalistic acanthus decoration, and supported by richly decorated and beautifully formed S-shaped consoles. These effects were not only the product of the finesse of sculptural workmanship, but harnessed to the visual requirements of the building's overall design. The plan and elevation were almost perfectly integrated by geometry so that the core of the temple formed a double cube (Wilson Jones 2000, 66–68). The Roman temple was no longer simply a site for art, but a work of art itself.



Figure 18.2 Nîmes (Nemausus), “Maison Carrée.” Dedicated c. 2–5 CE. View from the west.

Photo: Danichou/Wikimedia Commons.

The Sebasteion at Aphrodisias, erected in the reigns of Claudius and Nero, displayed three-story colonnades with the three orders, Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian, superimposed. Because of the remarkable series of imperial reliefs that adorned the colonnades ([Figure 24.2](#); cf. Smith, [Chapter 24](#), this volume), it might be argued that this traditional work of columnar architecture was merely a setting for these visual representations. However, the frame itself was no less an artistic achievement. An upward curvature of the cornice, identified in the north portico, helped to produce an optimum visual effect for the vista from the outer gateway (*propylon*) to

the interior of the sanctuary (Otschar 1987). A parallel in the western Empire is suggested by the arrangement of forum precincts, bordered by colonnades that framed the field of vision toward the raised temple at the back of the square. This was a consequence of the axial symmetry that critics have often observed in Roman architectural formations. Honorific and triumphal arches likewise offered targets for lines of sight through urban thoroughfares, while in the eastern provinces street colonnades closed in on tetrapyla and kiosk structures.

However, not all Roman design was axial. At Rome, the Temple of Trajan appears to have diverged at an angle behind the porticos to the rear of the great spiral column (Claridge 2007). At Palmyra, the Severan arch forged a shift in direction ([Figure 18.3](#)) between the main colonnaded street and the approach to the Temple of Bel through a well-crafted triangular design, so that it acted like a hinge on which the visual axis and the movement of pedestrians converged. The area to the east side of the Severan basilica at Lepcis Magna was planned to achieve the minimum of visual and spatial disruption between the divergent orientations of the new forum complex to which it belonged and the earlier street axis.



Figure 18.3 Palmyra, Severan arch. Detail of the central archway, c. 212–215 CE.

Photo: Edmund Thomas.

Theater and Rhetoric

Around the middle of the first century, a new architecture appeared that challenged the assumption that buildings needed to be bulky to carry artistic weight. Its characteristics exploited the technical advances resulting from working with the new concrete and were influenced by the visual and literary rhetoric of the Sublime (Thomas 2014). In the vanguard of this conceptual revolution in aesthetics was the Oppian wing of Nero's Domus Aurea, the work of the engineers (*machinatores*) Severus and Celer. Illuminated by shafts of light and adorned by airy paintings of the Third Style, the architecture created an aura of radiance and sublimity that was new not only to Rome, but to anywhere in the Mediterranean. Twenty years later, the architect Rabirius aimed to outdo this with his Palatine palace for Domitian, its "Aula Regia" and "Dining salon of Jupiter" (*Cenatio Iovis*) viewed as a recreation of celestial splendor with their broad, gilt lattice ceilings carried on timber trusses, richly marbled walls and floors, and pavilioned column displays with extravagantly decorated columnar ornament (MacDonald 1982/1986, 47–74; Zanker 2002).

Roman architects now began to play with the meaning and versatility of its schoolroom building blocks, the classical orders. From its much earlier beginnings in ephemeral stage design in Classical Greece, ancient architecture had sought a theatrical effect through the creation of perspectives through column surrounds and the semblance of palatial opulence by means of a top-heavy structure with imposing doorways for the actors. In the Latin theater, the greater proximity of the audience to the stage made its architecture more dominant. Such dramatic settings quickly found their way into Italian theaters and fueled the architectural imaginations of Roman *domini*, whose domestic walls became adorned with the false architectures of Second-Style painting. In the Roman east, as at Aphrodisias, the earliest marble stage façades of theater buildings had already presented a columnar architecture with anti-classical effects including mixed orders, variety of ornamentation, and broken pediments (Theodorescu 1996). From the second half of the first century CE, a new "aedicular architecture" (*Tabernakelarchitektur*) replicated the innovations of permanent stage designs and fictive painted walls in the civic streetscape, producing an urban theater, a palatial setting for the consumption of the wider public (MacDonald 1982/1986, 201). The urban environment was no mere functional backdrop, but now a theatrical setting in which everyday actions and rituals were staged. Quickly it became ambiguous whether the street replicated the stage or vice versa. In fountains, libraries, bath gymnasia, and other public buildings (Burrell 2006; Quatember 2011), the potential of architecture as a visual language with dramatic and rhetorical force became realized.

Scholars have argued how far this architecture was the outcome of indigenous traditions or Roman influence (Meyer 2007). At any rate, the Library of Celsus at Ephesus ([Figure 24.9](#)) was a synthesis of local working practices and traditions with both explicitly Roman

iconography—for example, the *fascēs* woven into the pilasters of the façade—and architectural features unfamiliar in earlier Greek practice, such as ressauts, column pedestals, composite capitals, and a frontal staircase with side spur walls. It was in this context of theatrical column displays that novel features such as shell niches and spirally fluted columns emerged in the Flavian era in the Roman east and, a century later, began to achieve greater prominence. In the enigmatic “Building M” at Side, a “baroque” rhetoric of the classical orders was played out around a colonnaded court, fueled by such luscious chiaroscuro effects of aedicular architecture.

The new column displays that marked the exteriors of Roman buildings came to articulate interior space in both secular and religious contexts. It was in the basilica that columnar composition first occurred. In an extension of the late Republican tradition of a spacious central hall and two side colonnades with galleries, Vitruvius designed at Fanum Fortunae (Fano) near Ravenna a high, voluminous space that was supported by a giant order and lit through the clerestory-like openings between its giant columns and the pilasters of the side aisles (*On Architecture* 5.1.6–7); the Basilica Ulpia of Trajan’s Forum provided the fully developed form with two rows of the columns on either side and the marble floor brilliantly lit through the wide openings of the upper order of the inner row. Such architecture was a shaping of material form and color, a celebration of columnar diversity, and a manipulation of stained and brecciated marbles from the Greek East and North Africa. However, among civic buildings it was above all the bath gymnasium that saw the culmination of this development, most dramatically in the grandiose, stage-like backdrops to the swimming baths (*natationes*) of the later imperial baths in Rome (DeLaine 1997). Caracalla’s survives most vividly. In the same years, the syncopated interplay of heavily projecting cornices was transferred to a court of the bath gymnasium at Sardis (Yegül 1986).

Mass and Volume

The most artful use of the columnar orders to delineate a space arose from their combination with the voluminous potential of vaulted concrete structures. The frigidarium hall of Caracalla’s baths in Rome was marked by a giant order projecting with ressauts at the edges of the cross-vault, which dominated even the Herculean statues that stood between the columnar screens at either end. The somewhat later creation of Diocletian’s baths became the basis of the baroque hall of Michelangelo’s church of S. Maria degli Angeli, and its dynamic power as a spatial volume was recognized in the obvious borrowing from this conceit in the hall of New York’s Penn Station (DeLaine 1999). Yet, if to Renaissance artists, and to moderns, it was these bulbous vaulted halls that seemed most worthy of emulation, in antiquity it was the massive bronze ceiling of the hemispherical caldarium, the *cella solearis*, that provoked comment (DeLaine 1987).

Religious architecture was likewise transformed. The use of internal orders appeared at Rome shortly before the Christian era in the Temple of Apollo Sosianus, where a coloristic effect was achieved by the use of pilasters in brecciated marbles. Around the middle of the second century the interior of the “Temple of Bacchus” at Baalbek ([Figure 18.4](#)) was lined by a giant

order of columns protruding in ressauts to frame two stories of pedimented niches and culminated in a stairway up to the innermost adyton. Around the same time in Rome, the Temple of Hadrian was built with an innovative barrel-vaulted interior; and a few decades later, temples in Syria were constructed with vaulted ceilings in cut stone. In the early fourth century, the Temple of Venus and Roma belied its Hellenic peripteral exterior with walls lined with Egyptian purple porphyry and the inner ends of the back-to-back cellas vaulted with two huge semi-domes (Dumser 2005, 195–282).



Figure 18.4 Baalbek, “Temple of Bacchus,” c. 150–160 CE. Interior view, looking east toward the entrance.

Photo: Edmund Thomas.

The dome was perhaps the greatest art form of Roman architecture. In so far as “art” can be regarded as the production of beautiful forms, the creation of a hemisphere was the highest artistic achievement of architecture since, as Cicero wrote, the sphere was the most perfect shape, in terms of evenness, balance, and consistency, and for that reason the form of the Earth (*On the Nature of the Gods* 2.47–48). At that time, the form was visualized architecturally only in the small sweating rooms (*laconica*) of Campanian baths, where it had originated as an extension of the principles of cross-vaulting to a centralized space and served to retain an intense heat in a reduced space. However, within barely a generation it had acquired a more monumental form, embracing spaces of over 20 meters in the massive rotundas of the spa baths at Baiae by means of aggregates involving the uniquely resilient local material of *pozzolana*. In

the next century it found its most stunning and ambitious outlet in the complexes of the emperors. In the imperial palaces of Nero and Domitian, the Golden House and Domus August(i)ana, the dome could roof octagonal spaces as well as circular ones, and sometimes demonstrated a conspicuous celestial symbolism by the starry imagery of its decoration (Lehmann 1945; Hemsoll 1988 and 1990, 17–26, fig. 2.13). In Hadrian's Villa at Tivoli, an achievement of supreme architectural virtuosity with its cross-vaulted bathing suites, multiple garden spaces and aquatic displays, its island villa (the "Maritime Theatre") composed of interlocking convex and concave colonnades, and a triconch reception area anticipating the imperial courts of late antiquity, nothing caught the eye, inspired the imagination, or gave the body a greater sense of freedom and exhilaration than the spacious envelope of its distinctive domes divided like a pumpkin into segments or gores from the apex, the probable invention of the emperor himself: the domed vestibule at the entrance to the vast open courtyard that Renaissance artists termed the "Golden Square" ("Piazza d'Oro") probably served as a vast audience hall for the emperor (Hemsoll 1990, 20–22; MacDonald and Pinto 1995, 95–97). Its heaven-like orb appeared to float over visitors to the imperial court, and the absence of corners and secure boundaries in the bulbous lobes of its ground plan produced an almost destabilizing effect.

In the art of the dome no building is second to the Pantheon of Rome, with its copious rotunda designed over Agrippa's circular open precinct. Designed in all likelihood by Trajan's architect Apollodorus (Heilmeyer 1975; Hetland 2007), and completed by Hadrian with a monstrous octastyle portico of 50-foot granite columns (Wilson-Jones 2000, 199–212, and forthcoming), the Pantheon was both an intellectual and an emotional experience. Fixed at the center of Augustan Rome, at the compass point of a circle that passed through both the Mausoleum and the center of the Theater of Marcellus (Sperling 1997, 331–333), the new rotunda brought the Augustan plan to fruition. With its inner diameter of 147 feet ($3 \times 7 \times 7$) it was virtually the same height as the Mausoleum. Unlike most domes since, which are divided into a multiple of four parts to correspond to an axial organization of the interior below—a structure that is found in the Pantheon itself at the level of the drum—the inner dome was divided into 28 parts, a multiple of 7 that resisted such subdivision (Wilson Jones 2000, 190); the number, it seems, was chosen because it was not only perfect, but corresponded to the astronomical cycle. Yet it is the physical and psychological impact on the spectator of its voluminous interior ([Figure 18.5](#)) for which the Pantheon is most memorable. Entering through the gigantic columnar frontispiece, across the threshold of dazzling *africano* breccia, and beneath an enormous arched lintel high overhead, the visitor is absorbed into an overwhelming marbled space. The spotlight of the sun's rays is cast through the oculus at the apex of the dome onto the marble veneer of the walls. A pavement of porphyry squares and circles is itself enclosed within the circular rim, a square of seven by seven, aligned on the major axes of the interior. The seven exedras are screened by columns of yellow Numidian marble, the central one, once perhaps the site of an imperial throne, preserving an axial superiority with its flanking columns in front.

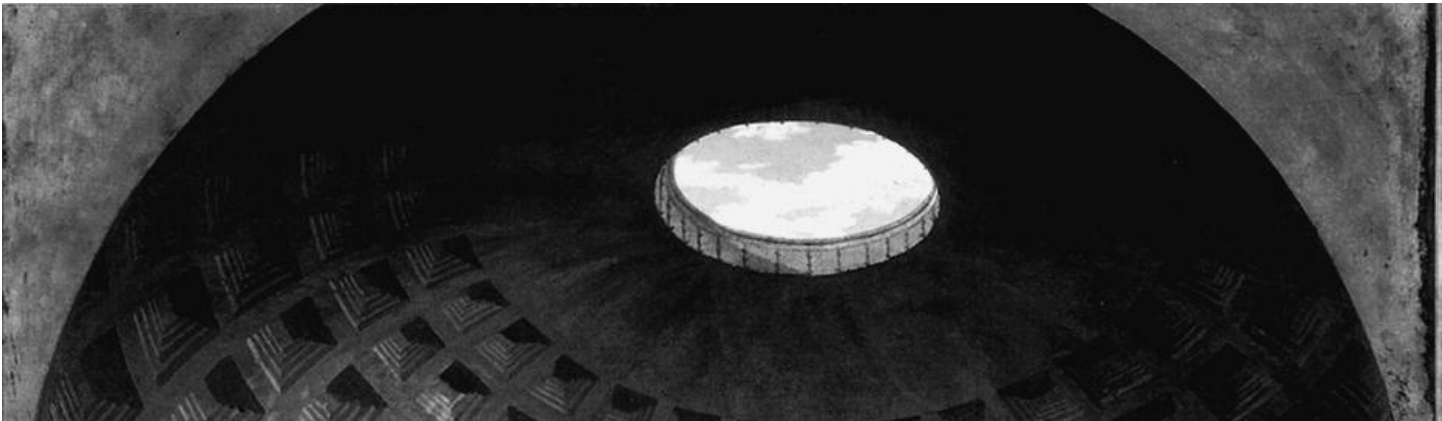




Figure 18.5 Panini, Giovanni Paolo, “Interior of the Pantheon in Rome, c.1734. Oil on canvas. Washington, National Gallery of Art, Samuel H. Kress Collection.

Photo: Hajotthu/Wikimedia Commons.

If no dome elsewhere matched this one for size or splendor, its influence was far-reaching. On the fringes of Rome and at Ostia, replica rotundas, likewise approached by frontal steps to ascend the raised podium, sprang up as imperial mausolea or religious buildings, sometimes lit by small, round windows in the drum (MacDonald 1976). In the eastern provinces a half-size Pantheon was erected a decade or so later at Pergamon as the temple of the monotheistic divinity Zeus Asclepius, with the axiality of the interior emphasized by a greater width of the

central exedra (Hoffmann 1984 and 1998). If the building was not itself a direct inspiration, its leading forms became a conspicuous element of imperial grandeur and representation. At Gerasa (Jerash) in Jordan, a fountain building fronted by granite columns was enclosed under a semi-dome of rubble concrete ([Figure 18.6](#)).



Figure 18.6 Jerash (Gerasa), Jordan, Nymphaeum. Dedicated 190 or 191 CE. View from the east.

Photo: Edmund Thomas.

Epilogue

In one respect the art of architecture was more versatile than the other arts: the Roman principle of restoration allowed it to be renewed indefinitely without apparent threat to its aesthetic identity as an artifact (Thomas and Witschel 1992). Whereas a painting or a sculpture is and was regarded as unique and threatened by any potential restoration, buildings depended for their survival on constant maintenance, restoration, and repair. No Roman building was believed to lose its integrity in successive restorations. New materials could only revive the original, not obliterate it. In that way, the Roman art of architecture was constantly renewable, its buildings endlessly renewed.

The discipline of Roman architectural studies has itself received, and continues to receive, a similar renewal and reinvigoration, as successive scholarly works not only delve in greater depth and with a sharper edge into traditionally studied themes, but also raise a wide range of new issues. The artistic potential of Roman architecture in its theatricality, constructions of mass and volume, and uses of different materials can now be demonstrated and explicated in a wide and increasingly sophisticated range of projects concerned with digital reconstruction (Beacham and Denard 2003; Haselberger and Humphrey 2006; Favro 2010, 170–179; Frischer et al. 2010). Following the groundbreaking work of William MacDonald in the volumetric aspects of Roman architectural design (1982/1986), recent studies of Roman concrete (Lancaster 2005a) and other building technologies (Ulrich 2007; Taylor 2003) and of the design of orders (Wilson Jones 2000) have helped to enhance the awareness of spatiality in architectural formations. Individual buildings are sensitively placed within the complex notions of public and private “space” and landscape, so that the experience of architecture is better understood within a theoretical framework (Laurence and Newsome 2011; Russell 2015). The role of sculptural decoration within architectural buildings and complexes, which started to be explored in Germany in the 1980s, is now better understood, often with the role of digital reconstruction (Ravasi 2015). Architectural aesthetics has in the past been considered, if at all, only as a subsection of Vitruvian studies, but now, like ancient aesthetics in general, it is starting to be treated as a discipline of much wider import (Thomas 2015). Beyond those oppositions that have traditionally concerned scholars, such as form and function, “Greek” and “Roman,” center and periphery, and exterior and interior, new issues beckon that have up to now received scant attention: the nature of architecture as a “craft” requiring specialized skills like any other art (Wilson Jones 2000; Claridge 2005; Russell 2013); the “audiences” of Roman buildings and their potential or real responses (Marzano 2009); the relations between built architecture and written descriptions; and the nature of ephemeral architecture and its interface with the monumental (Thomas 2008). All of these issues together present an almost uncharted field for discovery that has the potential to reveal more extensively how Romans understood their architecture as “art.”

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Sear (1982, reprinted in 1998) remains the most straightforward and readable introduction for

undergraduate students and other readers new to the subject. DeLaine (forthcoming), in the *Oxford History of Art* series, promises to provide a more up to date and rigorous introduction to the subject, and the collected volume by Quenemoen and Ulrich (2014) in the *Blackwell Companion* series offers a comprehensive review of critical approaches covering the full range of the subject, with core chapters on different periods and shorter discussions on key issues. The principal more detailed works in English on Roman architecture are Boëthius and Ward-Perkins, authored jointly 1970, but separately published in 1978 and 1981 respectively. They provide a full discussion of the most important monuments within a chronological and regional framework. There are few more recent periodized discussions of Roman architecture, but Davies (forthcoming; cf. 2012) will provide an authoritative treatment of Republican architecture and Thomas (2007) focuses on the Antonine age, placing architecture into a wider context of ideology, symbolism, and contemporary responses to buildings. DeLaine (1997) is a model discussion of the organization and economics of construction for an individual large-scale building project that has important implications for Roman architecture in general, especially of the Severan period.

Important critical discussions on specific themes are offered by Wilson Jones (2000, on the orders and design), Taylor (2003, on the logistics of Roman building projects), and Lancaster (2005a, on Roman concrete).

Brief surveys of the principal types of public and private architecture, including temples, spectacle buildings, houses, and villas, can be found in Barton (1995 and 1996). A more detailed discussion of temples is offered by Stamper (2005); detailed accounts of amphitheaters are in Bomgardner (2001) and Welch (2007); and a comprehensive and authoritative discussion of theater buildings across the Empire is given by Sear (2006).

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PART V

Contexts

CHAPTER 19

Roman Art and “Private Space” Art in Roman Town Houses

Simon Ellis

Roman houses appear to have bedrooms, and dining rooms like ours. On the other hand, Romans had no “offices,” and Roman houses were also places of work. Modern house owners choose to decorate their houses, carefully picking out furniture, wallpaper and paint, and objects. This is superficially similar to the Romans. Like us, their choices were circumscribed by fashion and availability. “Brave” people might make some very personal or unique choices. Top Italian aristocrats could afford to have sculptures by “known” artists. Further down the social scale, the potential to acquire art in terms of price and access became much reduced. Then as now, everyone has some kind of artwork in their house, from the shape of the most basic cooking pot to the style of the coin in their pocket. Yet one might question whether the owners of such objects saw them as artwork, and whether they “appreciated” the design that went into them.

A house reflects the interests of three people: the architect/builder, the designer/decorator, and the owner. Simple forms of houses could be those mass built by developers in a setting like Rome or “vernacular” buildings in remote provincial villages. Individuals’ choices of houses also reflected the general fashions of society and particular social groups.

Ancient texts and scenes of everyday life are important sources of knowledge about the use and articulation of art within houses, but both are subject to conventions in expression that may be difficult to transfer into our own interpretive frameworks, as for example when a room scene is shown out of perspective. We may thus debate whether we can ever have an “objective” view of what goes on within a Roman house.

Scholarship has been “hung up” for a long time on the Latin terms for the rooms in the house, in particular *triclinium* and *cubiculum*, conventionally interpreted as dining room and bedroom, respectively. In this chapter *triclinium* is used without italics to represent a reception room that included a dining function, normally associated with evidence of dining couches, three rectangular or one or more semi-circular; the latter is known as a *stibadium*. The term *cubiculum* is used without italics here to indicate a room, often with evidence of one rectangular couch, more intimate (smaller) than a *triclinium*, that was likely used for more private activity, including dining, sleeping, and love-making. All scholars know, although they may conveniently forget, that there are a whole host of reasons why these terms do not necessarily describe any material feature, nor do they describe a room with a specific function. Even scholars who use the term in its narrowest meaning would admit that a dining room or *triclinium* was not used solely for dining, that such a room had a broader reception role for respected visitors, and that it could be used for many other activities if convenient. Equally, no one would see a bedroom or *cubiculum* as being solely for sleeping; rather, it was a more

secluded room for quieter contemplation, or, as Penelope Allison has suggested, a “boudoir” where personal items might be kept and perhaps where people dressed (Allison 2007, 273).

There are also major limits to the archaeological evidence. Walls of houses are rarely preserved above foundation level and architectural interpretation must be based around plans rather than elevations. In the vast majority of sites, including Pompeii and the sites of the Vesuvius area, objects are moved from the rooms in which they are normally kept or used. In most sites the layers that are excavated right down to the floor levels (and below) contain “redeposited” material from earlier centuries, which has been thrown into the room as foundation for a later floor, or rubble from clearance of another room. Attributions of objects to their “original” locations or context within a room or even within a house must be clearly proven.

There is also a question of use versus design. While objects can represent the use of rooms, this may change on a day-to-day basis. This could certainly be seen as “flexibility” in their use (Nevett 2010), but it is different to design. If we write on the dining room table or have a TV dinner, does this make the dining room into an office and the living room into a dining room? In terms of activity, yes, but in terms of design, no. If we are studying art and architecture we may well be studying how houses were designed as much as how they were used. Furniture was just as movable as today, although masonry foundations, or plain panels of mosaic, suggest some permanency for couches in some rooms.

A central emerging question in the study of the Roman house is that of domesticity: What kind of activity took place in Roman houses? Early scholarship on aristocratic Roman houses relied on the one hand on art-historical analysis of painting and mosaic, and on the other on the excavation of simpler provincial structures. In the late 1980s and 1990s a more sociological interpretation was adopted, considering access patterns and usage based on décor and furniture (Thébert 1987; Ellis 1988; Wallace-Hadrill 1988). In the first two decades of the twenty-first century there has been a further questioning of research methodologies.

Cooper (2007) has introduced a subtle new element into the debate about public and private roles of the house, suggesting that Roman houses were both completely public and completely private. The front door was always open and anyone could enter. The only difference between the domestic peristyle and the forum was that the former was owned by the “dominus,” whereas the latter was civic property. The implications for art are that domestic art was fully public art. Public art in the forum set out the values of the state. Public art in the house set out the values of the owner, who of course wanted to be seen as a respectable upholder of state values.

Allison (2004) has revived the study of domestic artifacts in their contexts. These serve to question what activities actually took place in the spaces of Roman houses; the domesticity of the behavior as compared to the more “ritualistic” interpretations suggested by the décor. Similarly, Bowes (2010) has questioned whether the domestic architecture and décor of the Late Antique period should be seen as reflecting an increased hardening and hierarchical nature of social relations compared with the High Empire.

This chapter covers both art *in* houses, décor and furniture, and art *of* houses, their overall design. It suggests that Roman houses included a wide range of functions: “office,” shop, formal audience (patron/client, emperor, governor, commander, or bishop), religious shrine (lararia, chapel), and clubhouse. The Roman model of domesticity was thus different from our own. It is not possible to present a comprehensive picture of art in Roman houses in the space allotted and so two houses will be presented to form the basis for discussion. The House of Marcus Lucretius Fronto represents a wealthier Pompeian on the eve of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE. This is compared with a third-century CE house from North Africa; again a house of someone with some status, but not one of the richest in the city.

The House of Marcus Lucretius Fronto

The house of Marcus Lucretius Fronto ([Figures 19.1–19.6](#); cf. Peters 1993) is a small house with Third-Style paintings of “incomparable refinement and beauty” (Clarke 1991, 146). This indicates already that high-style decor was not limited to the richest houses. By inheritance or through other difficulties, a rich house owner might have found himself with a smaller property. While it is normally assumed that for Romans property reflected social status, in an urban setting factors such as availability and confining property boundaries meant that size of property, or indeed location, may not always reflect rank. This house is located at some distance from the more central districts of Pompeii and yet the owner was able to finance good paintings. It is very much divided into two areas, each with its own reception rooms and kitchen ([Figure 19.1](#)). The street front portion centers on an atrium, and the rear portion, which extends further to the northwest, centers on a garden area.

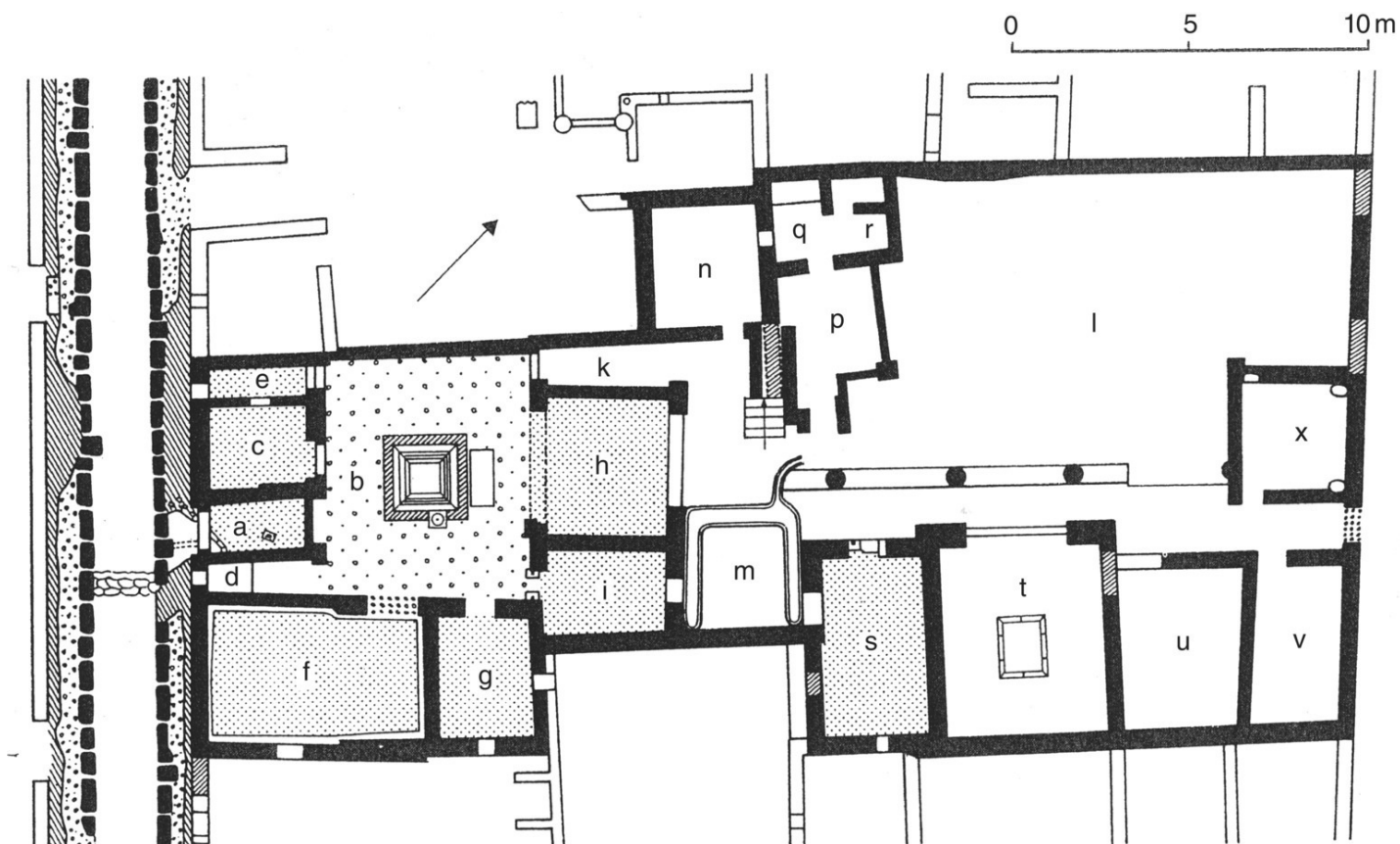


Figure 19.1 House of Marcus Lucretius Fronto, Pompeii, floor plan.

Drawing: John R. Clarke.



Figure 19.2 House of Marcus Lucretius Fronto, Pompeii, atrium.

Photo: Giovanni Lattanzi.



Figure 19.3 Portrait herm of L. Caecilius Felix from the atrium of his house in Pompeii. Naples, Museo Nazionale Archeologico, inv. 110663.

Photo: Archäologisches Institut, Cologne Digital Archaeology Laboratory, Universität zu Köln, de Fitt73-13-06_13589.jpg (www.arachne.uni-koeln.de).



Figure 19.4 House of Marcus Lucretius Fronto, Pompeii, reconstruction of tablinum.

Reconstruction: D. Baker & M. Blazeby, Department of Digital Humanities, King's College London.



Figure 19.5 House of Marcus Lucretius Fronto, Pompei, reconstruction of cubiculum g.

Reconstruction: D. Baker & M. Blazeby, Department of Digital Humanities, King's College London.

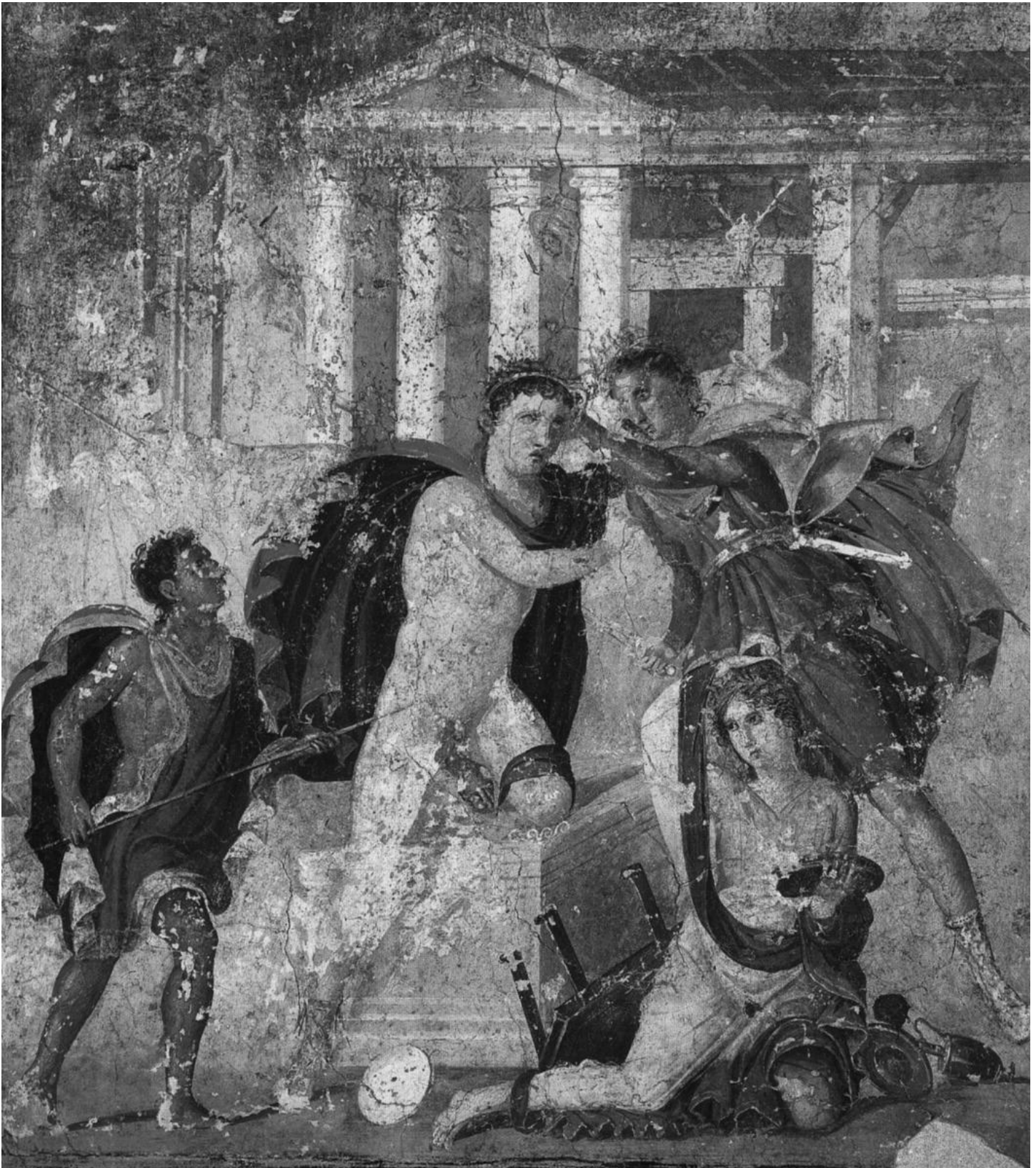


Figure 19.6 House of Marcus Lucretius Fronto, Pompeii, Orestes killing Neoptolemos, winter triclinium.

Photo: WolfgangRieger/Wikimedia Commons.

The house is entered by a short entrance corridor (a). It was simply painted in three color zones, black at the base, red in the middle, and white at the top, reflecting the colors used

throughout the house, perhaps a kind of “badge” for the owner’s property or a personal taste that friends would recognize. The main axial arrangement of the building was very carefully laid out. The main entrance door was in the middle of the façade, but behind the façade the rooms stretched off to the northwest, slightly off perpendicular to the orientation of the street. The entrance corridor followed this alignment, arriving slightly off one corner of the atrium court in the northwest of the front part of the house, creating space for a two-room suite (f, g) to the southeast, and a small “lodge” or “store” (c) to the northwest, without disturbing the axial alignment of the overall property and creating a seemingly orderly and symmetric progression to the far end of the building. The store (c) contained a shallow recess, which is often termed a “bed niche,” forming the basis for interpreting the room as the lodge of a gatekeeper or porter, but Allison (2004, 71–74) has reinterpreted it as a built-in cupboard and the remains of “industrial” activities, which would suggest that the room had a utilitarian function. Two very narrow rooms to the north and south of the “lodge” and *fauces* (corridors) were probably also for storage, and the southern one had evidence of fitted shelves (Allison 2004, 75).

The axial progression was key to aristocratic Roman housing, in which architecture and décor emphasized access by the wider public near the street and limited access to the rear part of the house to more privileged friends, as signaled by more complex artistic work or more intimate décor and settings. Plans of aristocratic houses throughout the Empire were subtly “adjusted” to ensure axuality, and the décor was also co-opted to emphasize the succession of rooms. Here a “dark,” “austere,” or “severe” black-decorated front half of the house ([Figure 19.2](#)) can be contrasted with a rear “light” garden area, the northwest wall of which was decorated with exotic animals. Already from the entrance, visitors would glimpse the light in the garden beyond the darker atrium.

The atrium (b) had a floor of crushed black lava and white chips. The walls were also painted black and contrasted with the white marble *impluvium* (central basin) and associated marble *cartibulum* table ([Figure 19.2](#); cf. Sinn, [Chapter 16](#), this volume, for similar objects). No sculpture has been found in this atrium, but we know from literary sources and archaeological finds that sculpture was often displayed in atria (Carrella et al. 2008). The Roman nobles stored their ancestral portraits (*imagines maiorum*) in their atrium (Flower 1996), and people of lesser status sometimes imitated this habit. For instance, in the atrium of the Pompeian banker L. Caecilius Iucundus, a freedman, there were two inscribed portrait herms of Iucundus’ father L. Caecilius Felix ([Figure 19.3](#); cf. Bonifacio 1997, 92–94, no. 36, pl. 29). The very striking but austere black-and-white decoration of Lucretius Fronto’s atrium was very appropriate for the area of the house in which the *domina* and *dominus* (mistress and master of the house) would formally receive guests in the daytime, and at early morning or evening respectively. A black décor was common in Pompeian atria; indeed, it was said that the word “atrium” was derived from Latin *ater*, meaning black. The use of an essentially black foundation to the design seems somewhat gloomy or “Gothic” to modern eyes. However, to the Romans, especially in the late Republic and early Empire, there was virtue in “restraint” and severity of manner. The black walls of the atrium are separated into different panels by inhabited red borders, and within each panel delicate gold tendrils are alive with detail. This includes small masks and animals. Clarke (1991, 150) felt that the *fauces* and atrium were

decorated for a rapid perusal, but the fine detail of the atrium panels and tendrils rewards those who look more closely. This detail implies that beyond the black “austerity” was someone, either owner or decorator, with artistic sensitivity.

The possible use of the room to the west of the atrium for artisanal activity should be kept in mind, however. Allison (2004) has used finds from several Pompeian atria to suggest that, although finely decorated, they were commonly used for very utilitarian activities ranging from “parking” of carts, to weaving, cooking, and more. Interpretation of décor sees the visitor as “lingering” over paintings, but such fine artwork may often have been obscured by furniture, vehicles, or smoke. If an important visitor was expected, the room could be cleaned up quickly enough, and any finds of more “working activity” could also represent the particular circumstances on the eve of the Vesuvius eruption rather than the “norm” of domestic life, such as collecting precious items for protection or removal. While very finely decorated, this style of painting in the atrium was somewhat out of fashion by the end of the first century CE. Just because the painting was finely executed does not mean that it was appreciated either by the house owner or visitors, but such arguments can be overstressed, and it is reasonable to assume a high degree of understanding and appreciation.

The “pushing” of the atrium to the north of the property allowed the tablinum (h) to be central to both the front and the rear of the house, which had more extension to the north than the atrium area. Indeed, the angled entrance was perfectly positioned to allow people to see right through the tablinum into the garden area, with a glimpse of the forward-most column of the single colonnade fronting the rear “yard.” As Clarke says (1991, 146), this could “fool” a visitor into expecting a full rear peristyle, and suggest a much more regular axial plan than was actually the case. It would also give the general visitor and tradesman a sense of the privilege they were missing in only visiting the front part of the house, rather than the more intimate garden area with its own reception suite.

The original site notebooks indicate that part of a chest or storage unit was found in the tablinum (Allison 2004, 81), which could relate to the common fashion of storing family treasures in the area of the atrium or tablinum, often in a large chest known as the *arca*. The paintings, the family treasures, and the marble furniture all served to impress the socially and economically inferior traders and clients who are likely to have been limited to this part of the house. They indicated to such visitors an owner who was sophisticated and wealthy: able to help his clients through business and social advancement.

The north and south walls of the tablinum have typical central panel paintings, to the north Mars and Venus, and to the south Dionysus and Ariadne ([Figure 19.4](#)). The paintings do not dominate the surrounding panels, but draw the viewer to them by showing a throng of people, in contrast to the surrounding architectural fantasies. The latter comprise at the top of the walls delicate theatrical elements, with a multitude of thin gold columns set against a black background, while red panels between these elements ground the architecture and create depth. At the bottom of the walls the socle shows a garden “fence” of golden tracery, which somewhat floats in black surroundings with clumps of plants and garden furniture. By contrast, in the center of the walls the myths in large red panels are flanked by smaller pictures of villas,

which are “supported” by delicate gold stands or easels.

The major theme of Mars and Venus or Dionysus and Ariadne with a throng of onlookers may be held to refer to the owners as lovers (Venus), entertainers (Dionysus), the matron-weaver (Ariadne), and the warrior/breadwinner (Mars). Such speculations are always possible from Roman painting and some guests may well have suggested similar analogies during their visit, but it is utterly impossible to know whether the owner had any such intention when choosing the décor. Instead, he may have picked two scenes from a catalogue proposed by the painters or, disinterestedly, asked the painter to suggest his ideas.

A cubiculum to the southeast of the atrium (g) ([Figure 19.5](#)) shares the decoration of the tablinum. The black lava floor contained a white marble tessera outline of a geometric 3D box design. A plain panel to the rear of the room marks the location of the couch, from where a panel of Ariadne and Theseus could be seen in the middle of the wall to the viewer’s left and a panel of Venus to the right. Such topics could be associated with a use of the room for intimate encounters, which might also be enhanced by appropriate artificial lighting of oil lamps to “spot” these panels in this windowless room.

Ariadne and Venus feature in both tablinum and cubiculum. We cannot tell whether they were “favorites” of the owners or stock images of the painters. Clarke (1991, 156–158) uses these paintings in the tablinum and cubiculum for a general discussion as to whether they reflect the owner’s taste, concluding that they are a pastiche of various other figures common in other Vesuvian painting. This may be true, and yet they still represent something of a choice of the house owner. Clarke identifies the cubiculum as a woman’s room on the basis of Ariadne and Venus. This seems unnecessary, although it would have been a convenient place for the domina to rest from her duty presiding over the household in the tablinum during the day. More interesting is the theme of Dionysus and Apollo, which Clarke sees in the presence of the two gods’ attributes (i.e., Apollo’s lyre) in the tracery of the two rooms. There is no need again to link this with the owner, but the two gods were very appropriate for someone who clearly enjoyed both art and entertainment. The difficulties in interpreting the two rooms demonstrates how easy it is to obtain a general impression of the wealth and influence, artistic understanding and education of the owner of a Roman house, but harder to suggest his particular interests.

While the atrium probably received most light from the opening in the roof over the central impluvium pool, the light in the tablinum could be varied by the use of lamps and wooden shuttering at the far end of the room, where it opened onto the garden. Closed shuttering could emphasize the austerity of the room. Opening the rear of the room would enliven it with the scent and colors of the garden, while the light would pick out the golden tracery on the black background of the walls. Light, both natural and artificial, was used by the Romans to affect the design of a room and the atmosphere for various meetings there. The subtle use of shadow and dimmed light from artificial lighting is more difficult for us to appreciate now, as modern lighting indulges in “blanket” coverage rather than the interplay of light and shadow (Ellis 2007). For example, the villas set on “easels” painted on the tablinum could have been delicately counterbalanced and highlighted by lamps on similar bronze stands just in front of the paintings.

Another cubiculum (i), between the previous one and the atrium, was redecorated in the Fourth Style, which was in vogue in the epoch before the eruption. At each side of the door of this room was a medallion depicting a girl and a boy. Clarke (1991, 159) assumes that this is a child's bedroom, although it could equally have functioned as a "play" or "day" room, located between the supposed room of the domina and the tablinum. The yellow walls had two panels, one depicting Narcissus ([Figure 4.3](#)) and one of Pero breast-feeding her imprisoned father Micon. The latter is accompanied by a related painted verse. The mention of *pudor*, modesty, in this poem alongside the use of the same word to describe Lucretius Fronto in an election graffito outside the house is a clear example of how art could be used to highlight a house owner's self-proclaimed virtue (Milnor 2014, 108–116), assuming that one accepts the attribution of the property to Fronto based on several of these election "posters" in the adjacent street. The room may then have been designed for some degree of public access, unless the owner meditated privately here on a virtue that he publicly espoused for electoral purposes. Although this room was decorated with more "advanced" paintings than either of the adjacent rooms, Allison (2004, 74) records the presence of some "industrial" remains in the room, suggesting that it had a more utilitarian use just prior to the eruption.

The final major room at the front of the house (f) had been identified in texts as a triclinium, since couches were said to have been found there. Allison (2004, 46, 78) has reinterpreted the remains as parts of a chest, so the room may instead have been for storage, although this does not preclude the use of couches too. A slight recess around walls of the southwestern two-thirds of the room is highly suggestive of the presence of three dining couches. In the final period of the house's use, the extra dining space may have been superfluous, or it was only used for special occasions, as it had more "up-to-date" fashionable paintings. The room had been redecorated in the Fourth Style with yellow panels and was the largest room in the front part of the house. The main pictures depicted Orestes killing Neoptolemos ([Figure 19.6](#)), and Mars and Venus (lost). The repetition of the Mars and Venus theme, which was also used in the tablinum, may have helped to create some link between the two main front reception rooms, which were painted in different styles in two different epochs.

Such triclinia at Pompeii are often located in a "darker" corner of a house. However, in later provincial houses rooms with three dining couches (often termed triclinium, oecus, or exedra by modern authors depending on setting) are well lit, opening directly onto the peristyle. Sometimes a "closed" dining room is said to be a "winter suite" and an "open" room a "summer suite," and this distinction could be applied to the atrium and garden reception suites here, although such arrangements are more likely to reflect different tastes than different seasons. The cubiculum and triclinium at the front of the house were deliberately designed as more secluded rooms. The former, with its black décor, was the more "sober," "old-fashioned" room. The yellow dining room was "lighter" in color, but still not the kind of "open" room for an extravagant dinner, including space for entertainers, which would more likely have taken place in the garden suite.

The front part of the house thus contained almost all of the rooms necessary for public receptions. The more austere atrium stands in contrast to the lighter, both in color and in mood, triclinium. The tablinum was a particular masterpiece, whose "black" background was

enlivened by much light coming in from both the atrium to the west and the garden to the east. The “crowding” in the two main panel paintings in the room probably duplicated the crowding of visitors, both poor “clients” and higher-status “amici” (Wallace Hadrill 1988). The fine marble *cartibulum* table, and remains of a storage chest, perhaps the family *arca*, suggest an area in which visitors could also admire more portable family treasures such as silverware. Allison (2004) sometimes points out the absence of finds as significant for function, but such items might move on a day-to-day basis. George (1997) has suggested, for example, that finds in Pompeii are more a reflection of patterns of storage than of usage, and people trying to escape the eruption may have removed personal possessions. Archaeologists always caution that “negative evidence,” the absence of a tell-tale object, is not sufficient to prove or disprove a particular association.

The rear part of the house consisted of a garden area fronted to one side, the southeast, by a major reception suite. The larger, lighter, more open spaces here contrast with the darker, more closed spaces at the front of the house. A single colonnade separated the garden area from the reception suite. Opening onto this colonnade lay from south to north a triclinium (s), an oecus (t), and a cubiculum (u). The three columns in front of the oecus provide something of a “minimalist” portico, leading the visitor from the tablinum to the main reception room of the rear suite. The western column greets the visitor from the tablinum and indeed can be seen from the entrance to the house. The remaining two columns are situated so as to frame both the view into the oecus from the garden and, above all, the diners’ view from their couches out of the oecus. The colonnade was thus a boundary dividing nature in the garden from man-made painted scenery in the rooms. It was a covered pathway funneling privileged guests from the tablinum to the largest reception room in the house, while the doorways and intercolumniations formed a series of windows across this path from the shelter of the rooms to the “wild” of the garden.

The triclinium had Fourth-Style yellow panel walls and a main “tableau” to the rear of the room depicting Pyramus and Thisbe. The adjacent oecus contained pieces of a couch or table, as well as bronze and glass or pottery vessels (Allison 2004, 93) consistent with a dining function. Marble fragments suggested the presence of sculpture or furniture such as a marble dining table (Allison 2004, 94). A central stone setting in the oecus may mark the location of a dining table or fountain.

Beyond the oecus the cubiculum once had pictures of Europa and the Bull, Danae on Seriphus, and Neptune (Clarke 1991, 162). In it was found wooden furniture, a chest or couch, as well as unspecified lighting equipment, and a brazier or cooking pot (Allison 2004, 91). It may also be noted that eight skeletons were found in this room (Allison 2004, 194). They may have been members of the household, or even outsiders sheltering from the eruption and trying to cook before they succumbed.

There were two areas of kitchen facilities in the house, in the east and west corners of the garden. The one to the west may have served the front reception suite, while the one to the east may have served the oecus and associated garden suite. The western kitchen was provided with a latrine (e) and a lararium. While religious artifacts might be displayed anywhere in a

Roman house, and prayers might have been offered to any portable terracotta effigy, placement of a more permanent shrine was often associated with especially significant locations such as a corner of the atrium—the “heart” of the house, the kitchen—or the hearth or garden, linking spirits and nature (Foss 1997). The paintings in the house generally evoked more of a cultural than a religious sensitivity, and only at the *lararium* was religious sentiment eliciting prayers and ritual explicitly invoked.

Just to the south of the western kitchen and thus behind the *tablinum*, where it opened onto the garden, was a staircase to an upper story. This is an important reminder that what we see today was but a small part of the overall house. It is normally assumed that upper floors tended to copy the lower ones, as the Romans were unwilling to risk collapse by building upper walls that did not follow those below. It is often argued that kitchens and perhaps access to the upper floor were hidden away so that “functional” activities would not be apparent to visitors. This desire had to be balanced against ease of use and the need to keep food hot on the journey from oven to table, hence the use here of a separate kitchen for each dining room/reception suite.

As the guests visiting this suite of garden reception rooms looked across the garden, they were met by large paintings of beasts in combat on the far side of the garden. Each fighting pair was separated from the other by a large red “column.” The whole idea was clearly to create an artificial “jungle” seen through a “faux colonnade” on the far side of the garden. Like the glimpse of the first garden column from the *fauces* when the visitor entered the house, this created the impression of opening up the house to a far greater “exotic” and perhaps dangerous world, but one that by the end of 79 CE in Pompeii would have at least seemed familiar from the amphitheater. The owner of the house who gave prominence to such scenes might have been alluding to his financing of such shows. In later imperial times, similar scenes are found in African houses whose owners captured the beasts before sending them to Rome. Factional symbols and named animals demonstrate that such scenes might refer to particular occasions, or renowned combatants financed by the house owner. They also demonstrate that the fame of a particular beast was enough to make an impression on important guests.

Again, the garden of the house of Lucretius Fronto was void of sculpture when it was excavated, but generally speaking, Pompeian garden peristyles were the prime location for displaying sculpture (Carrella et al. 2008, esp. p. 274 with statistics). Ranging from *oscilla* with relief decoration, marble theater masks, and herms ([Figures 16.1, 6, 7](#); Sinn, [Chapter 16](#), this volume), to statues of animals and mythological figures, the predominant themes were nature and the Dionysiac realm, fitting to the location. While *oscilla* and masks would hang on walls and from portico architraves and trees, Dionysiac figures, Venus statues, and various animals may be placed in the garden area and evoke the atmosphere of a sanctuary or villa garden.

From late Augustan or Tiberian times when the first black, gold, and red Third-Style paintings were made, to the late first century CE when the Fourth-Style yellow rooms and beast hunts were painted, the owning family’s tastes moved from restrained but subtly cultured depictions and allusions to more blatant images of power and wealth. This movement also happens from front to back within the house, as the owner wished to appear more traditionally authoritarian

and patronal with poor clients in the atrium/tablinum, and more open and extravagant with social superiors and friends in the relaxed garden area.

The House of M. Lucretius Fronto thus presents highly sophisticated architecture and décor, both of which worked in harmony to create a flow and change of atmosphere from the subtle but austere front rooms to the “open” (in terms of light, décor, and social activity) rear of the house. The two parts of the building were not, however, completely segregated, and visitors were afforded glimpses of the further parts of the house to which not all would have had access. Roman houses did not tend to have any rooms that were “secret,” or where entry and exit were tightly controlled, until the introduction of audience chambers in late antiquity. In this sense, Roman houses encouraged people to seek further intimacy with owners rather than shutting off rooms as completely “off limits.” The Roman house showed a closed façade to the street, it did not have a semi-public porch or verandah, but once through the front door any visitor could get a good idea of its innermost workings.

It is important to remember that for a Roman aristocrat his house was also his place of work. The front of the house was austere, but we could also describe it as “business-like” in being designed to represent the owner in his public role as patron. The décor of the rear reception suite was also intended to have an impact on visitors, but presented a more demonstrative image of the owner’s wealth and was probably where he felt less need of restraint with closer friends. The closest we get to modern “domesticity” in a Roman house was probably the cubiculum, which was deliberately “closed” for more intimacy, and yet despite Clarke’s (1991) attempt to identify rooms with women and children, there is very little sign of their presence. The domina may have been seen in the tablinum, but this again was in a role as head of the house in her husband’s absence rather than in a “family” setting.

Roman domesticity as manifested in Pompeian decor emphasizes more of the household in society than the family. Even the repertoire of finds from Pompeii covers more artisanal activity and display than domestic functions. The closest one gets to domesticity is perhaps evidence of weaving, which was idealized as part of the Roman domestic ethos. By contrast, while dining was an overt display of wealth and liberality, cooking was relegated to servants and more secluded spaces.

The House of the Bound Animals, Thuburbo Maius, Tunisia

The House of the Bound Animals (Ben Abed-Ben Khader 1999) is a “modest” house in a provincial setting ([Figures 19.7–19.8](#)). Thuburbo Maius is a smaller rural city of Roman North Africa that attained some wealth by the third century CE, becoming a *colonia* under Commodus, as it was located in the “breadbasket” area of the Medjerda valley southwest of Carthage. The house was nearer to the town center, only 50 meters due west and to the rear of the Capitolium, whereas the Pompeian house was in a relatively more marginal location.



Figure 19.7 House of the Bound Animals, Thuburbo Majus, overview.

Photo: Giraud Patrick/Wikimedia Commons.

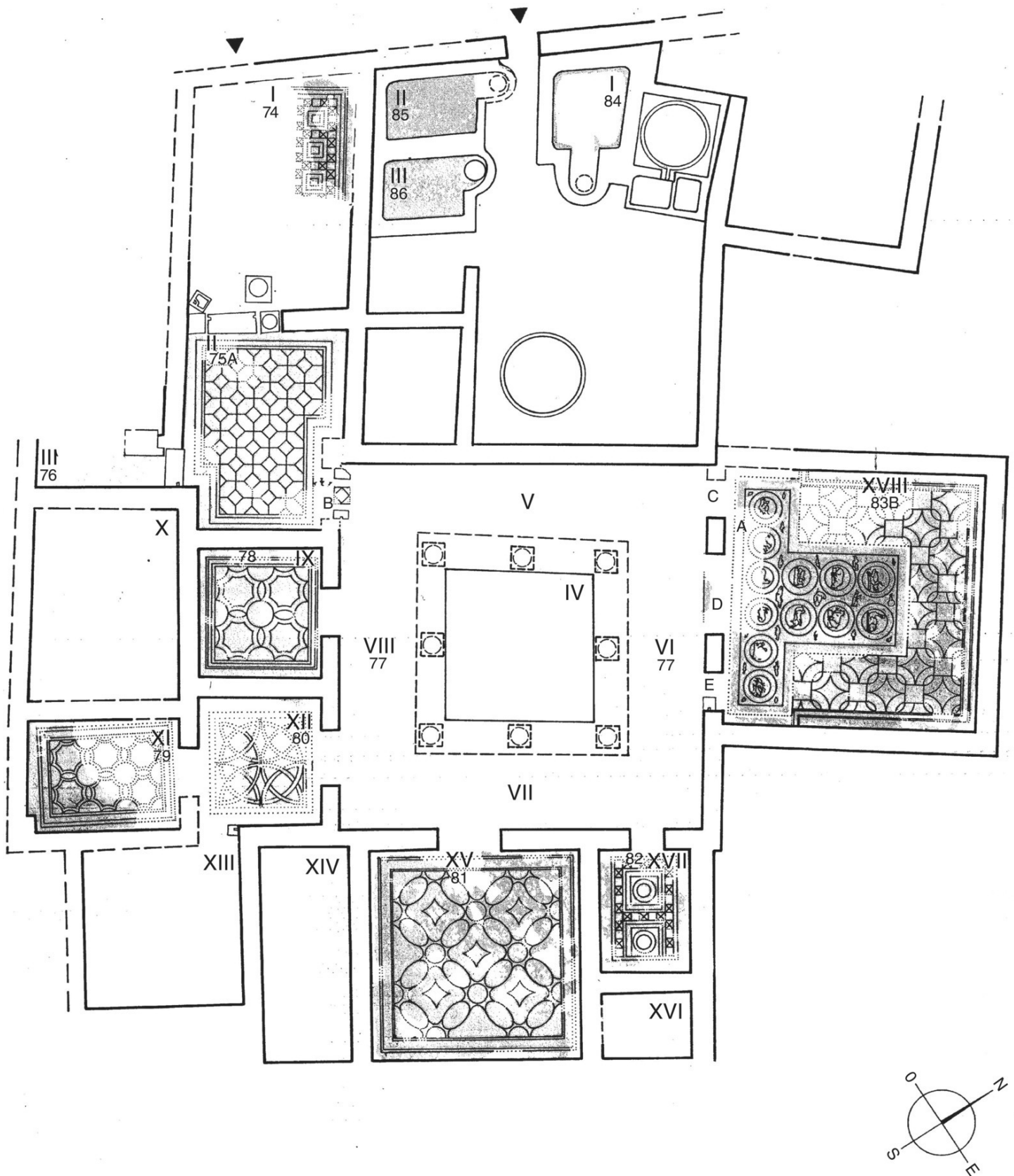


Figure 19.8 House of the Bound Animals, Thuburbo Majus, floor plan. Ben Abed, A. (ed.) *Corpus des Mosaïques de la Tunisie Vol II Thuburbo Maius* (Dumbarton Oaks, 1999) and INAA, Tunis, plan 22.

The house was entered through a series of two or more vestibules or antechambers paved with

geometric mosaic. At Pompeii we can follow art through the wall paintings rather than the flooring. The former may be considered more immediately apparent to a house visitor unless they have their eyes glued to the floor! However, in the majority of the remains of Roman housing very little painting or even walling is preserved, and instead we must rely on floor mosaics.

The first or westernmost vestibule of the House of Bound Animals was about four meters wide and six meters long, and thus somewhat more spacious than the narrow “fauces” entrance of a Pompeian house. In this particular house, the vestibule may have had something of the function of an “atrium” at Pompeii. First, like the atrium this vestibule possessed a cistern, whose well-head lay very close to the eastern exit door from the room. In this case water was collected through “downpipes” from the roof rather than from the impluvium pool below an open-roofed atrium. Secondly, like the atrium, this vestibule was probably used as a waiting area for visitors. It was paved with a mosaic showing small, stylized flowers in an overall black-and-white geometric setting. The mosaic may have set the tone for the room as a “holding” area, not richly decorated, but suggesting an owner who had some wealth.

The second vestibule or transition area from the vestibule to the peristyle court was entered from the west, with an exit into the central peristyle through the northeast. There was thus no direct line of sight; indeed, there were multiple doors between the street and the heart of the house, which lay three rooms in from the “outside world.” The sockets for doors to close the link between the two vestibules and next to the cistern well-head were preserved. Whereas a view through to the garden of the House of Marcus Lucretius Fronto was encouraged, here it was indirect and blocked by doors. The second vestibule was paved with a mosaic that used the same elements, simple “flowers,” in a different geometric pattern to the first room. Both rooms thus use something of a regular carpet design, which neither gives the visitor a particular view point, nor encourages passage to the next space.

In Thuburbo we see a closed entrance of two successive vestibules, in comparison with the more sophisticated Pompeian atrium court, but once these are passed, the peristyle at Thuburbo provides immediate access to all rooms, whereas at Pompeii there is a progressive opening up of rooms as one penetrates further into the house (Grahame 1997). Provincial houses of the High Empire could be much larger than this, but in general they are all based around a large, central peristyle opening up the center of the house to all-comers.

The central peristyle had three columns on each portico, and a small central “garden” or open area. It was common in North Africa and at Thuburbo for the porticos to be covered in mosaic, but the floor was not preserved in this house. North African houses often had semi-circular basins or fountains around the peristyle, which were commonly decorated with marine mosaic scenes, even in remote semi-desert towns, perhaps to demonstrate the “riches” of the sea in the same way that “menageries” of land animals illustrated the richness of estates (see later discussion). The basins with continually flowing water, as in Pompeian houses, suggested that even in a hot climate Roman aristocrats could liberally throw away such “liquid gold.”

Leaving the second vestibule, the visitor faced directly down the west portico of the peristyle to the main triclinium of the house. Like the house of M. Lucretius Fronto, the House of the

Bound Animals was not completely axial and the triclinium is positioned off one corner of the peristyle. Typically for African houses, it was entered through a triple doorway, as opposed to the single door used for the Pompeiian reception room. In this instance the visitor was “directed,” by the vestibule door and portico, to the western of the three doorways. In the High Empire of the second to third centuries CE, the main reception room was normally by far the most sophisticated room in the house, with the richest mosaics, a triple doorway, and often a fountain in the room itself or just outside. The triclinium was clearly identified as such by the floor mosaic, consisting of a richly decorated T-shaped panel nestling within a U-shaped plain mosaic where the three dining couches were set out.

The T-shaped panel lay with the crossbar of the T in front of the entrance and the “leg” of the T stretching back between the couches into the room. It consisted of 12 laurel wreath roundels, within each of which was an animal with its legs bound together; hence the name of the house, the “Bound Animals.” The animals include boar, deer, goat, hare, and many kinds of birds, including partridge, swan, geese, thrushes, pheasant, and chicken. In the spaces between the roundels swim 23 different fish, while the outer border of the mosaic consists of 23 groups of fruit (peach, quince, pomegranates, apples, pears) or flowers (roses, lily), usually in bunches of three to five each. Where the border makes a right angle turn, this arrangement is interrupted by the face of a “bacchante” (five in all), or a satyr (three in all). The mosaic represents a good part of the flora and fauna that would have been available for the dinner table from the local environment. The fact that so many different “dishes” were “crammed” into the mosaic in itself suggests an attempt to stress the gastronomic resources of the estate and the liberality of the owner. This motif of animals in laurel roundels is common at Thurburbo ([Figure 19.9](#)).



Figure 19.9 House of the Protomes at Thurburbo Majus, triclinium mosaic, Tunis, Bardo Museum.

Photo: S. Ellis.

It is interesting to note that all of the elements on the main panel, as opposed to the border, are oriented to be seen from the entrance as the visitor arrived. This is not always the case. Thus, for example in the House of Asinius Rufus at Acholla, a T-shaped triclinium mosaic has roundels featuring the labors of Hercules and wild animals, which are oriented to be observed from the closest section of the border (Ellis 1997, 44). This would mean that several roundels were best observed from the dining couches themselves, suggesting a design that made the mosaic more of a dinner-time conversation piece. It might also be noted that the wild animals in the Acholla mosaic are leaping forward, implying the thrill of the chase, whereas those in the Thuburbo mosaic are hobbled with ropes around their ankles, indicating more game being readied for the table.

The diners in the House of the Bound Animals would enter to behold the complete menu of what they could possibly consume. They would take their places on the couches and look out through the open, three-door entrance onto the peristyle portico and colonnades with the setting sun, and light glancing off the mosaics and wall paintings. Servants perhaps used the doors to

each side, rather than the central, wider doorway, so as not to obstruct the view. However, the “grand” entrance of the main dishes, such as the tied boar shown in the mosaic, and the arrival of the entertainers, dancers, and musicians, may have taken place through the larger middle doorway (Ellis 1997). In this way, rather as an appetizer, food and depictions of it were closely related and spatially situated.

Small statues could also be found within such dining settings, for example the statues of Ganymede and the eagle from the House of the Greek Charioteers at Carthage ([Figure 19.10](#); Gazda 1981). The choice of sculpture seems to have been very much determined by availability and scholars have had great difficulty establishing the theme of domestic collections or relating them to the decor of mosaics and paintings which were more contextual to the rooms and the houses concerned.



Figure 19.10 Statuette of Ganymede and the Eagle of Zeus from the House of the Greek Charioteers at Carthage.

Photo: Pascal Radigue, modified by M00tty/Wikimedia Commons.

Later fourth-century domestic mosaics in Africa and indeed across the Roman world were to show large-scale panoramas of estates and hunting, in which the house owner himself was depicted in a heroic fashion, subduing the world around him (cf. Muth, [Chapter 21](#), this volume). In the House of the Bound Animals the theme is more restrained, not the realistic Hellenistic “discarded dinner table,” but more of a substantial, virtually complete dinner menu. The subjugation is not indicated by showing the owner hunting live wild beasts, but the scene is more of a “still life” of the results of a hunt, as indicated by the binding of the animals’ legs.

Nevett (2010, 128–131) has pointed out that such mosaics do not depict specific African fauna, and depictions of owners and villas can be found in earlier periods (cf. the depictions of buildings in the House of M. Lucretius Fronto). The mosaics can thus be positioned within a broader imperial iconography. Hales (2003, Part Three), however, cautions that provincial mosaics, while evoking imperial fashions, were designed with a provincial context and audience in mind.

The large triclinium stood alone on the north side of the peristyle at the House of the Bound Animals, but a second, smaller reception room to the southeast was flanked by smaller suites that were probably cubicula. The rooms in the southeast range were also paved with the now familiar geometric mosaics. The floor of the reception room consisted of five roughly square but rounded medallions of laurel, interspersed with ovals of a geometric “wave” pattern, and small circles of ribbon design. The centers of all these shapes contained flowers. The cubiculum to the northeast was paved with two depictions of laurel wreaths, and simple flowers in their center. Each wreath was set within a square “guilloche” pattern, and another outer border of triangles and flowers.

Two small three-by-three-meter square rooms lay off the southwest peristyle portico, next to the second vestibule. That in the south corner of the peristyle gave way to two further rooms, one to the southwest and one to the southeast. Such small “suites,” entered through an antechamber, are common in African houses, affording a further level of privacy beyond the rooms that opened directly on the peristyle porticos. These rooms were once again covered with variations on the laurel wreaths and geometric figures with stylized flowers. It is notable that the southwest room is arranged on an angle: even the mosaic is turned slightly to face more to the north, encouraging the occupants to look across toward the triclinium.

The House of the Bound Animals at Thurburbo represents one of the smaller houses of Roman North Africa at the height of its prosperity in the third century CE, when African emperors ruled the Empire. It consisted of a carefully controlled and designed approach to a central peristyle. The latter was surrounded by a number of small apartments, which could be used as bedrooms or day rooms by various family members. There was also one large dining room, designed to impress guests through its rich mosaic floor and its triple entrance with a view on the courtyard.

It may be noted that the area in the angle between the first vestibule and the northwest side of the peristyle was occupied by a large oil-press building. Typically, “industrial” production went on alongside domestic life. The press rooms may indeed have been owned by the house, in the same way as Pompeian house owners designed commercial premises into their house fronts. They probably provided useful rents that defrayed the costs of maintaining rich mosaics and painting.

Conclusions

Both the houses presented in this chapter are relatively modest. In both cities, the largest houses could have more than one large courtyard with several reception suites. They do, however, allow us to observe several factors in house design and artistic decoration that the largest examples do not.

When space is at a premium, Roman houses emphasize reception suites, which are always the largest, best-decorated rooms in the house. Even modest owners used architectural devices, slightly altering the orientation of some rooms to create axial viewpoints to disclose particular paintings or artwork, and suggest the presence of grander features that the houses did not possess. Lighting interacts with décor. Lamps and shutters, especially in the case of reception suites, were used to draw visitors’ attention to certain features.

The two houses allow a comparison of the way in which the Roman domestic model changed as the Empire grew. The austerity and restraint of the Pompeian atrium were discarded. The axial progression through suites was replaced throughout most of the richer houses in the Empire with a model based on a central peristyle, from which most rooms were accessed directly. Mosaics of urban reception rooms often depict wild animals or countryside scenes taken from rural estates. The owner himself may be portrayed. While mythical scenes are still found, they become much less common even in remote provinces like Britain by the fourth century CE. This is a more personal view than in the Pompeian house, expressing directly an owner’s wealth and status. In this sense it is a new form of domesticity, allowing for example the depiction of the wife as well as the owner in the Dominus Julius mosaic from Carthage ([Figure 21.6](#); cf. Muth, [Chapter 21](#), this volume). The emergence of this model should be put alongside the development of more personal religious beliefs in late antiquity, leading to the further conception of the family under Christian teachers.

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Studies of Roman housing tend to be based on either a Pompeian or a “provincial,” “non-Italian” perspective, but for an integrated approach see for instance Ellis (2000). Pompeian archaeology has such breadth and depth that it has its own separate discipline. Dobbins and Foss (2007) is an excellent presentation of current scholarship on Pompeii by the most prominent scholars, including the main debates on the house. In their bibliography can be found many of the increasing number of recent monographs on particular houses, which in themselves tend to be sizable volumes.

One can single out the work of Penelope Allison (2007) on the distribution of finds in Pompeian houses as of critical significance, because of its wider perspective on studies of Roman housing beyond Italy. The conditions, “under the volcano” in Pompeii, were both highly unusual and very well understood by modern scholars. However, a thorough study of the broader conditions for the deposition of domestic objects is desperately needed, as some sites are being “overinterpreted” using debris that is either redeposited or attests to a later “reoccupation” of the buildings.

There is no satisfactory recent summary of Roman housing outside Italy/Pompeii. To some extent this reflects the large number of houses uncovered. Broad-based studies of the western provinces always provide some overview on houses, but we are lacking them for many of the Mediterranean lands. Moreover, a view larger than a particular province or modern country is needed to examine key historical trends important for both art and archaeology, such as the adoption of a Roman way of life by provincial elites in the west, or the fusion of Greek and Roman housing in the east. Recent critiques of a functional interpretation of houses, such as Allison (2007), Hales (2003), and Bowes (2010), need to be integrated into a new overall narrative.

From the perspective of art, the same Pompeii versus provincial studies divide exists, although in this case it is largely dominated by an overall lack of evidence in provincial sites of art apart from mosaic flooring. Art studies on major items such as sculpture still tend to take them out of context, and it is more common to see monographs on all the sculpture in a province of a certain theme than it is to see analysis of sculptures from a particular house or houses; an exception, particularly given its provincial context, is Balty (2008). Nevertheless, studies of the full artistic context of houses do exist, starting perhaps with Clarke (1991), which remains seminal in this regard. Since Clarke such holistic work seems to be mostly about particular houses. A new general study of how art was chosen and “used” in the domestic context needs to be written.

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CHAPTER 20

Art in the Roman Villa

Richard Neudecker

Life in the Roman Villa: Literary Accounts

The primary and most characteristic space for Roman art was the Roman villa. The Latin term *villa* refers to any detached house outside the city, but what appears to be a clear definition soon proves to be too vague for us: our understanding of what constitutes grounds and buildings evidently does not correspond to ancient ideas. The difficulty increases as soon as we use the term “villa” in our modern languages, in which it is obviously shaped by specific cultural conditions. It was precisely the unique cultural and historical circumstances that gave the Roman *villa* its significance for the upper class and shaped its members’ individual lifestyle. In what follows, the term “villa” therefore always designates the Latin conception.

During the Republican era, it was the farmhouses and estates in the countryside that were called *villae* and whose appearance was explained in detail by Varro and Columella, both experts on Roman agriculture. When the activities of their owners, or *domini*, started to be divided between politics in Rome on the one hand and management of their own estates on the other, their presence in the latter became sporadic. They became visitors on their own property, and the estate itself was divided between the agricultural operations of the *villa rustica* and the manorial country house of the *villa urbana*. An estate amid profitable horticultural areas and bird-breeding sites outside the gates of Rome was called *villa suburbana*; one on the seaside above the installations for breeding fish and shellfish was termed *villa maritima* (Mansuelli 1958).

To reduce the total agricultural risk, an owner would invest in several villas in different locations and regions (Marzano 2007). Each villa was usually named after the location of the *praedium*, the agricultural area. A villa near Tusculum would be called *Tusculanum*, for example. As soon as his more important administrative and political activity (the *negotium*) in Rome permitted, a property owner would adjourn to one of his villas for *otium*, which originally meant freedom from public duties, and time to manage his economic affairs (André 1966 and 1993). However, the different locations of his villas also enabled him to enjoy the genial pleasure of a more restorative and climatically pleasant environment than Rome. Moreover, being away from the power struggles of Rome also allowed him to be truly himself as the lord of his domains, and to develop and cultivate his lifestyle, all without having to take into account his politically competing peers. Of course he continued to interact with his peers even in the villa, but here they were a participating audience of his lifestyle, not his competitors.

The villa’s original economic and social framework began to change in the late third century BCE, when the Roman ruling class encountered new cultural areas with a much greater

potential for both pleasure and wealth, and acquired both with a lust for beauty and splendor. Although the villa continued to be managed as an economically self-sufficient estate, by the first century BCE it was primarily used and cultivated as a space designed for a lifestyle that allowed culture and art to be enjoyed with few to no limits, and even beyond the limits designated by the concept of *luxuria*.

Ancient authors wrote, sometimes in passing, sometimes pointedly, about the most satisfactory locations for such activities, and the things that contributed most to entertainment and recreation, as they not only were participants in this lifestyle themselves but also, as intellectuals, liked to criticize all less cerebral pleasures.

As with good wines, some regions and features were more popular for villas than others, and both changed with the tastes and fashions of the time. The Roman aristocracy was first introduced to these new concepts of living in Campania in the second century BCE (D'Arms 1970). It was now possible to immerse oneself in Greek culture on the Gulf of Naples or to dive into the warm medicinal springs of the Phlegraean Fields. The region's popularity was closely connected to its therapeutic attractions and baths. It is no surprise, then, that medical body care was soon linked with other types of care for bodily needs, which is why Baiae became the topos for quite a rollicking bustle – for some people it even became the “haven of all vice” (Seneca, *Epistles* 51). In contrast, the mountainous regions of Latium, Sabina, and Etruria were suitable for such valiant pleasures as hunting, although in villas such as Domitian's Albanum this entailed little danger, but plenty of pleasure (Suetonius, *Domitian* 4.19). Intellectuals like Pliny the Younger even chose to write while on the hunt (*Epistles* 1.6); the young prince Marcus Aurelius occasionally found himself forced to choose between hunting and studying (Fronto p. 68 N.). For an intellectually meaningful repose (Cicero's fictitious philosophy seminars at his villa in Tusculum, for example), the hills around Rome were clearly better suited than the baths of Baiae.

After piracy was eliminated by Pompey the Great in the first half of the first century BCE, the *villae maritimae* were built along almost the entire Tyrrhenian coast. Their owners built beyond the coasts and into the sea at ever greater cost and also bred and ate rare fish and oysters. These activities earned them the nickname *piscinarii* (fish breeders), which simultaneously alluded to their lucrative husbandry, luxuriant lifestyle, and immense investments in their maritime domiciles (Lafon 2001). The construction of the Via Domitiana to Naples, and particularly the more comfortable sea route along the coast from Ostia, led to the seaside being densely populated with villas all the way from Formia and Circei to Antium and up to Lavinium and Centum Cellae, with their owners vying for the best locations (Statius, *Silvae* 1.3). Later, in the second century CE, that interest shifted northward to the lakes and the Adriatic arc around Altinum, where a “new Baiae” was developing (Martial 4.25). Divers clusters of villas soon formed owing to the desire of the upper class to enjoy the particular qualities of the given local climate and the visual appeal of the changing landscape and flora that were associated with it. They made the most of the mixture of contrasts such as sea and lake, and expected to experience both pleasant calm and a stimulating soundscape. Contrasts formed the basis for a major theme of Roman living; namely, to experience the so-called *rus in urbe/urbs in rure*—the country in the city and the city in the country—and to own villas that

provided all the amenities of “cities,” even in the most remote areas.

Like any cultural phenomenon, the villas spawned a literary discourse about the things that happened inside them and made them important. This discourse evolved around the category of *otium*, which contained equal measures of both criticism of and enthusiasm for the villa. The ancient texts that talk about the details of villa life thus do not provide information in a straightforward way, but always mediated by such discourses. When Cicero, Seneca, Statius, and Pliny the Younger commented on villa art, they did so in literary genres—letters, protreptics, poems for specific occasions—that indicated immediate knowledge and personal interest from the outset, as they were not trying to report historical facts but rather wanted to express the expectations, anxieties, and satisfactions that they and others acted out via the villa and art (Förtsch 1993).

M. Tullius Cicero in particular liked to give his letters a personal touch by occasionally taking a break from the scandals of the capital and devoting space to describing his desires, demands, and disappointments when acquiring artwork. He wanted to obtain quite a lot of Greek art from Athens for his villa, feverishly looked forward to the arrival of sculptures, and was enthusiastic when the subject was fitting and not too expensive. For his Tusculanum, he bought an Athena that fortunately matched both the gymnasium and his scholarly activities. He was, however, quite angry when he received a statue of Mars and some Maenads that did not fit his personality at all. Only in these kinds of situations would he appraise art by its artistic quality. Otherwise, he was sufficiently pleased with the impression that the statues created as ornaments in their respective locations. What was important for Cicero in works of art were their general connotations of Hellenism and education. In his villa, he used art to reconstruct an area indicated as a gymnasium, lyceum, or academy that recalled his studies in Athens and created an atmosphere for literary production. These are *topoi*, no different from those in the contrived letters that Seneca wrote to Lucilius. These too contain many blanket statements about intellectuals’ time spent at the villa. Seneca was so fascinated by the splendor, luxury, and perversity in the villa that he stopped paying any attention to individual works of art, focusing instead on the totality of the scene.

Somewhat later, the Neapolitan Statius dealt with individual (although not his own) pieces of art in villas more calmly than Cicero had done. His enthusiasm for the work of art that was the villa itself, however, seems excessive, and the poetic form of his eulogies, tellingly entitled *Silvae* (forests), is surely not the only reason for this adoration. He dismisses the obvious luxury of Manlius Vopiscus’ Villa Tiburtina as the mere elegance of attractive furnishings that betrays the aesthetic talents of the villa’s poetic owner (*Silvae* 1.3). Likewise, the amateur philosopher and poet Pollius Felix called for the busts of poets, wise men, and even generals to adorn his Surrentine villa (*Silvae* 2.2) so that they might reflect his intellectual prowess and make him appear “almost Greek.” Old works of art by Apelles and Polykleitos underpinned a quite general claim to education and taste. This could hardly be more banal and makes us wonder what works of art Pollius was really enjoying in his villa; it is implausible that even he, wealthy as he was, could have had an original “Apelles.” Pollius—Statius, actually—dwells in detail on the beauty of nature, trees, grasses, and flowers, and compares their charms with those of works of art. His gaze meanders between the patterns of gleaming colored marble

and panoramas of nature, from reflections of the light on artworks to mosaic pictures on the floor to the ever-changing vistas of the sea that were available from any window. He muses that the architecture may be more beautiful than the natural world around it, but in any case that the builder had conquered nature. The architecture provided variety for all situations and all times of day, primarily through its use of water: it gurgled in fountains inside and out, a stream was channeled through the house from its babbling source, and waves murmured on its banks until it reached the roaring sea. Acoustic attractions accompanied the climatic advantages of fresh water sources like the Anio at Tivoli.

Nature and art worked together to evoke myths, to make the presence of Aphrodite, Poseidon, satyrs, Egeria, nymphs, and sirens plausible, creating an atmosphere in which the villa owner could feel like a new Orpheus. These are *topoi* not only of poetry, but also of garden architecture, which provided *aediculae* and *sacella* as homes for divine beings, which had of course to be Greek and were therefore referred to as Taygetos, Chalcis, Helicon, or the Strait of Sicily. The landscape that stretched before their eyes changed likewise due to the incorporation of Greek mythology. An evident or at least latent religiosity was created by the hordes of mythical beings called up by Statius and dilettante poets. It is not without reason that gods and demigods were the most common artistic theme in the villas.

Another 50 years later, such artistic achievements in the villa were no longer worth mentioning. Pliny the Younger only wrote about his sculptures when the talented *topiarius* (landscape gardener) had carved them from boxwood trees: animal figures, along with sculpted letters that formed the name of Pliny, the owner. The natural meadows competed with cleverly designed flowerbeds; frescos of gardens and birds with glossy colored marble; and window views with paintings. Art and nature were ever more intimately intertwined to the point that a spring could arise in a room and ivy could grow into a thicket. The gurgling water might even lap a stone banquet bed, a *triclinium*, as though it were an island. The multitude and variety of the spaces and views guaranteed that the benefits for the eyes and ears would be available almost permanently. It is inconceivable that this wonderland of Pliny's could have come about without the artistic works of human hands—yet he does not dedicate a single line to them in his description of his villa at Laurentum, nor the one at Tuscum (*Epistles* 2.17, 5.6).

The literary praise for the villa contributed considerably to the value of *villeggiatura* as a lifestyle in that it established standards, recalled contexts, described situations, and reinforced feelings. In the texts, art appears closely linked to the villa's spatial and mental contexts. Perceiving shining marble is just as pleasant as letting one's gaze rest on lush foliage. Art and nature were the two aesthetic components of a villa. Their common denominator consisted in recalling and capturing myth in both the works of art and the view from the window; Greece was always gleaming in the distance, after all. Art was not always used exclusively to ennoble a villa's educated and extremely wealthy builder, but was also valued for its visual appeal. If we are to believe the literary praise for the villa, the true intention was to ensure that all the decorative elements were sensually pleasant; that is, both the architectural design of the villa itself and the natural beauty of its environment.

Art in the Roman Villa: Archaeological Evidence

In contrast to the scarce literary references to villa life, the remains of Roman villas are countless: the number of surviving villas in Italy and the western part of the Empire alone is estimated at about 4,000. About 1,000 sculptures can more or less confidently be attributed to villas, but we can comfortably assume that the villa was the original context for most of the Roman sculptures in our collections. For Italy, we only know the names of the owners of 47 extant villas, garnered from four different centuries and almost exclusively from the Gulf of Naples. This scarcity of information does not permit any detailed insights into the world of the villa, especially since most attempts at matching literary accounts with other knowledge of actual builders and extant villa remains are rather dubious unless they pertain to an emperor. This means that while our archaeological findings can show generally applicable concepts, they cannot tell us how specific individuals implemented their own personal ideas.

For a long time, archaeological research from Karl Swoboda (1969) to Alexander McKay (1975) strove for a typology of the villa that focused on structural forms and produced terms such as “avant-corps villa” and “portico villa.” An interesting essay by Paul Zanker (1979) on the imitation of the aristocratic villa in Pompeian domestic decoration style and culture raised awareness of the villa’s full significance for Roman cultural history. The focus of scholarship shifted from plans and layouts to spatial qualities and perception. Sculpture and mosaic were recognized, and have subsequently been researched as, important means for creating the atmosphere of a villa. In order to understand the full breadth of the phenomenon, the economic foundations and ecological effects of villas and estates will also have to be taken into consideration. To date, this has been exemplified by Andrea Carandini (Carandini and Ricci 1985) for the Villa of Settefinestre in Etruria, but has otherwise only been done for pure production villas. A completely unresearched area is how the villa related to its surroundings and interacted with the neighboring villages and shrines.

Among the many archaeological monuments that have been discovered, many provide little insight, while a few are hugely significant. Harald Mielsch (1997) has offered a concise summary of these finds. In their totality, they confirm the growing tendency toward a high regard for vistas of nature and material luxury, which can also be seen in the literary sources. However, only the archaeological finds show how densely the villas were filled with art and how refined the design of the views and vistas sometimes was (Neudecker 1988). As a result, the following passages do not name every interesting monument, but rather endeavor to mention the most informative and well-documented ones.

Nature and Culture

Ad Gallinas Albas, “By the White Hens,” is the name of the villa of Livia, wife of Augustus, situated on the Via Flaminia outside Rome near present-day Prima Porta (Reeder 2001; Forte 2007; Settis 2008). It was and is famous for two natural attractions, the first being a laurel grove that, due to a miraculous event, grew in its garden, from which the wreaths of the Julio-Claudian emperors were collected. The second was an underground hall in the garden that is

now in the Museo Nazionale Romano di Palazzo Massimo and may have been used as a banqueting hall in summertime. Its visitors will have found themselves in a pleasantly cool grotto, looking out on a *trompe-l'oeil* grove that was painted on the walls with astounding skill. All the painted trees, shrubs, and flowers can be precisely identified, and may well have caused the viewers to wonder how all these things could ripen not only in the semi-darkness of the grotto, but also all at the same time, regardless of season, so amazing are the brilliance and precision of the reproduction. The perfect depiction of a sunny garden is a pleasant contrast to the fresh semi-darkness of the hall. It is like a climate chamber whose walls are the last barrier before free nature, in which the most diverse assortment of birds frolics freely. However, at the border, on a painted fence, there is also an empty birdcage like a symbol of the domestication of nature. A large peristyle garden in the villa likewise provided rich flora to look at, although only the underground garden hall had it all year round, and in a pleasantly cool environment at the height of summer. Climate was a criterion for assessing any villa or villa landscape. The Gulf of Naples was more popular in the transitional seasons, the mountains of Latium and Sabina in the summer. Climate problems were solved with rooms like Livia's garden hall. The natural climate was changed and an atmosphere was created that was conducive to the pleasant interplay of art and plants.

Another playful taming of nature can be seen in the "cutout animals" in Pliny's villa garden. Cicero's description of the philosopher statues in the portico of his brother's villa, on which the ivy grew so well that they could be taken for the gardeners themselves (*Letters to Quintus* fr. 3.1.5), was an even wittier play on the same trend: although this intimate connection of statues and plants was noticed only in passing, and may not even have been planned, Cicero still associates it with the repertoire of a *topiarius*, a landscape gardener.

We have Wilhelmina Jashemski's decades of research to thank for our understanding of the significance of garden cultivation, which is not found as clearly in any literary description or fresco (Jashemski 1979; cf. Carroll, [Chapter 26](#), this volume). The park of the Oplontis villa in present-day Torre Annunziata near Naples could be almost completely reconstructed as a result ([Figure 26.3](#)). As part of renovation work in the Neronian period, sculptures were supposed to be set up along the geometrically designed garden paths. When the work was rudely interrupted by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius that buried the villa in 79 CE, a stretch of about 60 meters along the side of a swimming pool had already been completed ([Figure 20.1](#)). Marble statues of Nike and Artemis, several portraits, and a herm of Heracles were set up on 11 different bases at regular intervals, each in front of a tree rather than the usual column. The variety of subjects and bases loosens up the strict linear order, giving it a certain refreshing naturalness. Looking out from an impressive dining hall in the main wing, however, a viewer would have seen statues of male and female centaurs arranged cross-wise, likewise preparing for a feast under oleander bushes; their small size would have made them seem farther away than they really were, turning them into a picture. Pompeian walls show us painted gardens dotted with sculptures, although these gardens are not carefully domesticated, but wildly exuberant. The mass of vibrant green serves to make the colorful statues all the more conspicuous and attractive. An entire wing of the Oplontis villa is dedicated to staging real and painted glimpses through lit courtyards, as well as into wild gardens and an enfilade of dining

halls (cf. [Figures 26.4, 26.8, 26.9](#)). Real fountains alternate with painted ones so that we can assume that the birds painted on the walls, which could have come from the pages of an ornithology handbook, were also contrasted with actual caged birds. As in the painted gardens on the walls, the sculptures in the real gardens of the Oplontis villa ([Figure 26.3](#)) were also accompanied by water in various forms. A garden without fountains is, in fact, hardly imaginable, and while Cicero's mockery of house owners who called the little brooks in their small gardens "Euripus" or "Nilus" (*Laws* 2.1.2) usefully comments on many a Pompeian garden, it also confirms that nothing ever happened without water.



Figure 20.1 Oplontis, view of the large *piscina* with statues.

Photo: DAI, InstNeg.1976 (o.N.).

The actual reason for the various water installations was the climate; the justification was the aesthetic value of the splashing and the reflections. During the imperial era, there was an array of luxurious villas at Stabiae high above the sea, but connected to it by ramps. The Villa San Marco (Barbet and Minero 1999) used this amazing location for a dining hall with a breathtaking view of the Gulf and Mount Vesuvius on one side, and of domesticated water, as it were, on the opposite side. Here, water audibly gushed out of the center of an artfully curved nymphaeum, cascaded down, and gurgled in the background like a spring, before it filled an extensive basin amid old plane trees. A stucco relief showing various gods is visible on the curved back wall of the nymphaeum under faux arches, as though marble statues were standing in deep recesses ([Figure 20.2](#)). Immediately to the side of the cascade, mosaic images presented the myths of the abduction of Europa and the unfortunate sea crossing of Phrixus and Helle. The gentle spray of the water gave the colorful mosaics an astonishing effect that could not be seen from the dining hall, however, because of the plane trees. They could only be discovered by walking through the side porticos to an adjacent, cooler cryptoportico.

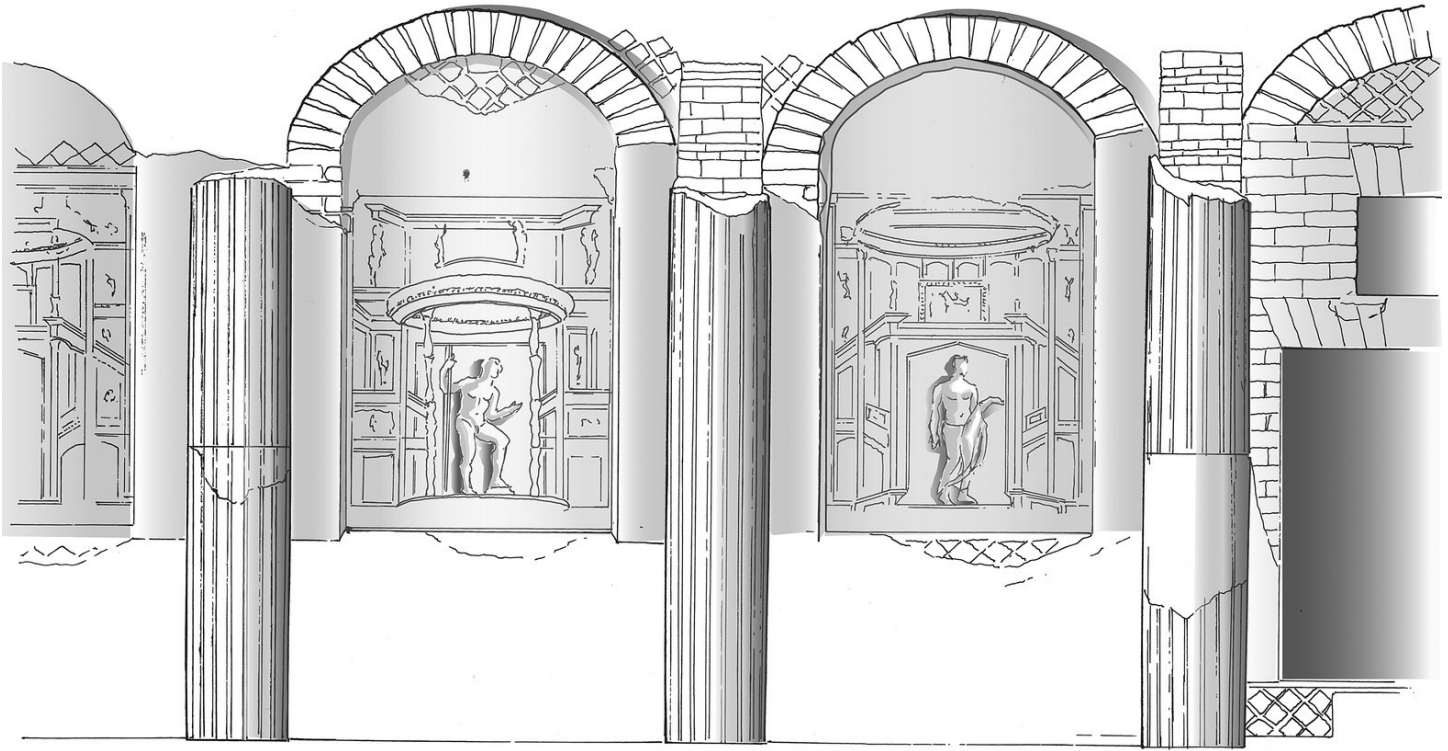


Figure 20.2 Stabiae, Villa San Marco, view of the nymphaeum.

Drawing: M. Schützenberger.

Living among gods and heroes

From the large dining hall, the view extended all the way across the sea to the distant Gulf of Puteoli. The earliest villas were built there on mountaintops in the second century BCE. Starting in the late first century BCE, they were expanded down to the beaches with the aid of terracing, and in the early imperial era they were built out into the sea until we finally even find artificial islands being heaped up for villas in the water. Parts of such villa complexes from the early imperial period are well preserved in Baiae due to the fact that the sea gradually flooded the buildings as the sea floor subsided.

A hall from the Claudian period was examined underwater and reconstructed in the Museo Archeologico dei Campi Flegrei for the exhibition of its sculptural decorations ([Figure 20.3](#); Andreae 1982; Tocco Sciarelli 1983). It was in fact a nymphaeum in which the water from a spring was collected and channeled, and which was therefore used as a climate-controlled location for feasts. The location was made particularly exciting by the fact that the *klinai* for the guests were surrounded by water and could only be reached by boat. The food and drinks themselves were also served on miniature vessels, while the sea, which was likewise dotted with pleasure boats, was visible outside. The rear apsidal part of this luxurious space had curiously rustic revetments, since the area functioned as a stage for marble statues of Odysseus and his companions. The scene immediately evoked the entire Trojan cycle, which was referenced in many place names in the Phlegraean Fields. In the semi-darkness, illuminated only by the flickering light of candelabra, the figures must have appeared almost lifelike. The scene that was selected is Odysseus' offer of wine to Polyphemus. The symposiasts were not

only transported into a mythological world, but were reminded of the negative consequences of overindulging at the same time, given that Polyphemus was ultimately blinded in his drunkenness. Polyphemus' enormous, lavishly decorated drinking vessel drew attention to itself and invited comparisons with the ornate silver or glass dishes that the guests undoubtedly held in their hands. Depending on their position on the *triclinium*, the participants would have seen additional marble statues in niches on the sides. The blurring of present and fantasy worlds would have been reinforced by portraits of gods, such as Dionysus, being presented alongside those of people, such as a Claudian princess. The high quality of these sculptures actually deserves lighting of the type afforded by museum technology, but penumbra as well as reflections of light and water in the nymphaeum were indispensable for creating an illusion of "reality," and had been taken into consideration as part of the sculptural display.



Figure 20.3 Baiae, Claudius' nymphaeum.

Drawing: M. Schützenberger.

Between the late Republican and early imperial periods, near Sperlonga in southern Latium one of the many terraced seaside villas was refurnished, which boasted as a special feature a rock cave directly on the beach (Andreae 1995). This cave housed a freshwater spring and resting places, but its primary task was to serve as a natural backdrop for the Trojan myths. The audience reclined on an artificial island in front of the cave (Figure 20.4), from where it was able to see four scenes from the *Odyssey*, the most impressive and powerful being the multfigured groups of the blinding of Polyphemus and the Scylla adventure (Figure 28.3). If the cliff around Polyphemus is to be plausibly identified with his cave, then its further employment in the next scene is rendered less convincing, as it is forced to function simultaneously as the rock reef at the Strait of Sicily that Odysseus' ship must pass. And when

finally Ganymede is being abducted by Zeus in the form of an eagle high on the rocky slope above the cave, a viewer may have wondered how the beautiful boy actually got up there. The scenes do not pretend to explain the myth, but rather abstractly refer to it, as did the peak of Mount Circeo, the mythical home of Circe, that was visible in the distance. In the reddish twilight and with the sound of the waves lapping the coast, the ensemble became akin to an elaborate opera—and it is safe to assume that it did not lack appropriate musical backing. In any case, the scene later moved a certain Faustus to poetry, which he left us as an inscription on site. Tiberius, who in all likelihood invited people here, liked to exhibit his mythological knowledge in front of images such as these. He could react quite angrily to a lack of learning among his guests. In fact, as if to increase the dramatic effect of the most gruesome scenes by contrast, the viewers were assembled in a cheerful feast on their island, the ingredients of which were alluded to by the vine overshadowing them from a pergola and the fish in the pools around them. Four small boys made of marble sat and stood among them around a small pool playing mischievously and threatening the guests with splashes of water. They seem to represent *deliciae*, young slave boys ready for fun and other pleasures, but were in fact depictions of small satyrs from the world of myth.

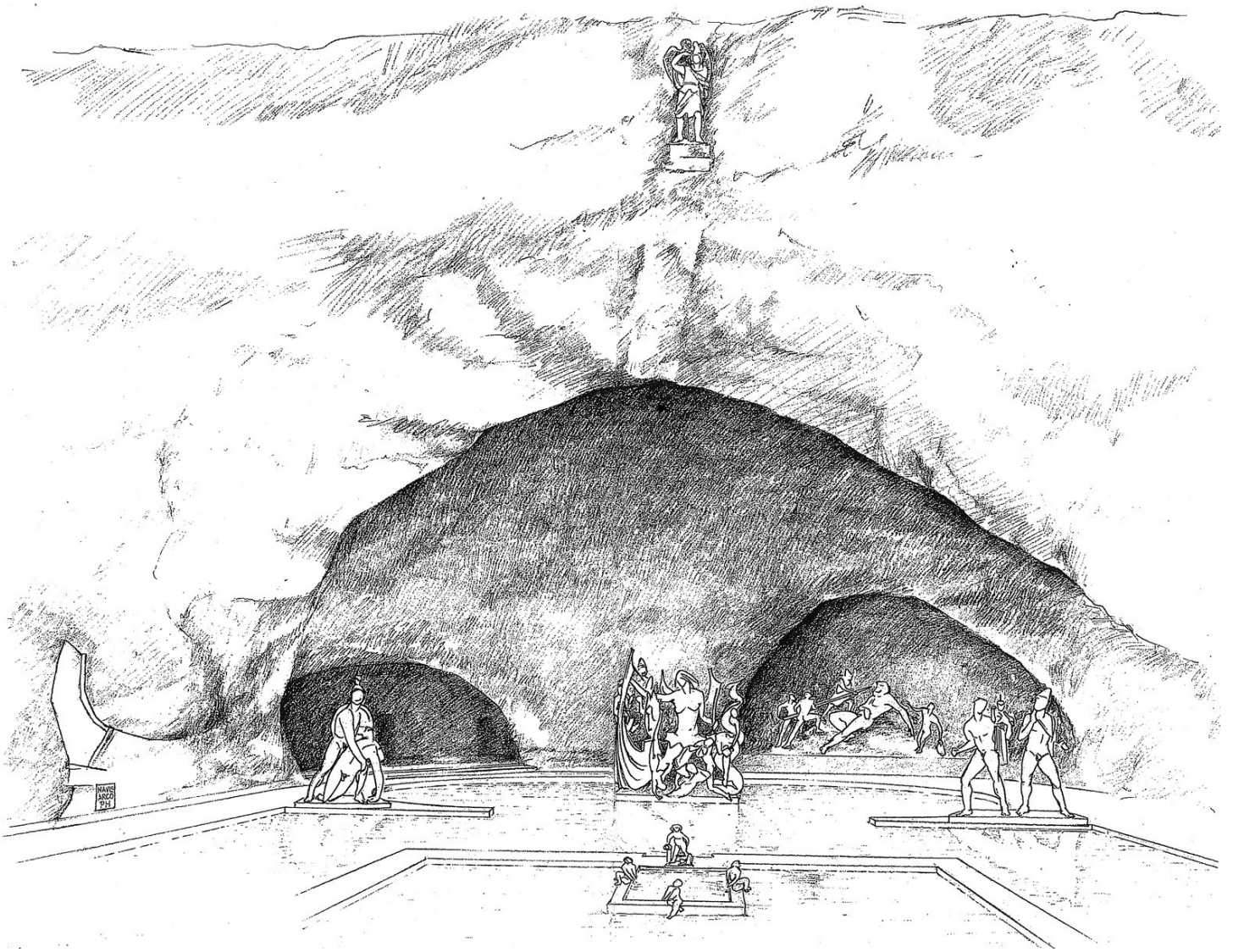


Figure 20.4 Sperlonga, reconstruction of the view of the grotto.

Drawing: M. Schützenberger.

A far-reaching comparison of the present with the supernatural world, of real beings and artificial figures, was of essential importance. Verism—that is, non-idealizing realism—was thus considered the highest of all artistic qualities. Myth was revived in certain natural settings, and, by being imprinted on the surrounding landscape in the form of place names, it also transfigured the villa into a world of the supernatural. This Greek mythological landscape stretched along the coast from the Phlegraean Fields to Rome and finally to Alba Longa, where Domitian himself sat in his Albanum, surrounded by the myth of Aeneas. But on the shore of Lake Albano, Domitian also found himself in a grotto showing the blinding of Polyphemus: good ensembles were frequently copied.

The Blue Grotto on the steep banks of Capri far below an imperial villa, however, was unique and unsurpassed for sensual stimuli of air, light, and water. Until they were moved to the Museum of Capri, marble statues of Poseidon and Tritons looked out from the blue water because, if we are to believe Statius, the sea gods are always present at a waterfront villa.

Playing Greek

Tiberius permitted only Greek to be spoken on Capri and the toga was replaced by the himation. The villa became a part of Greece where Greek cultural spaces were recovered, reconstructed with fragments of the “Gymnasium,” the “Academy,” or the “Lyceum,” or preserved in *bibliothekai* and *pinakothekai*. Even the storage rooms for fruit were transformed into far more glamorous *oporotheke* where beautiful apples were enjoyed like works of art. The villa lifestyle was so all-encompassing that we must avoid hastily dismissing it as fashionable “Greeking”; even though some contemporaries did indeed do that. Of course, this lifestyle was also created by the need to secure an edge in the social competition of the upper class, but besides blowing one’s own trumpet, looking at and possessing objects that were generally considered valuable also produced real self-satisfaction. As for education, this is where appropriation of Greek culture was deepest and created a strand of cultural identity. Unlike their literary education, the villa owners’ and their guests’ cultural orientation was exclusively Greek and the art in the villa was experienced as Greek almost without exception. Its authenticity was confirmed by bases inscribed in Greek; even damaged originals were gladly displayed without restoration. Despite these strategies, the art of the villas in fact almost entirely consisted of Roman copies, and thus corresponds to our receptions of Greek art in archaeological museums.

Procurement and creation of artwork reached its first high point at the end of the Republican era, when the Roman aristocracy established its new cultural identity. We are fortunate that a villa from this period, known as the Villa of the Papyri, by the seaside on the Gulf of Naples near the gates of Herculaneum, has been preserved with lavish artwork (Wójcik 1986; Mattusch and Lie 2005). Because it was buried by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE, it has been preserved in its early imperial-era condition; however, the display of its artworks is that of the late Republic. Most of the villa was searched between 1750 and 1764 through underground tunnels excavated deep underneath the modern surface. More than 80 marble and bronze statues and busts were discovered, as well as a number of mosaics and fresco fragments ([Figure 20.5](#)). Among the most important discoveries were the roughly 1,900 charred scrolls from the library, which almost exclusively contained Greek literature and philosophy. They are a primary source of evidence for the educational interests of the upper class in the first century BCE. Most of the sculptures and bronze statues were found in the places where they had been displayed, but it is not always entirely certain which of the eighteenth-century finds is which piece in today’s museum collections. There have been several attempts to recover a comprehensive ideological program for the décor based on the artwork in conjunction with the writings. However, whatever the plausibility of such attempts, the arrangement of the pieces in the villa can already tell us much about general ideas and everyday perceptions. The “Greeks,” about which we learned from Cicero earlier, stood in front of the columns in the large peristyle, for example, as if they were nurserymen even in this “Academy,” and the same garden was meant to appear as though it were populated by deer, a somewhat indecent couple made up of a goat and a satyr, naked athletes, as well as Hermes and a satyr on artificial rocks.

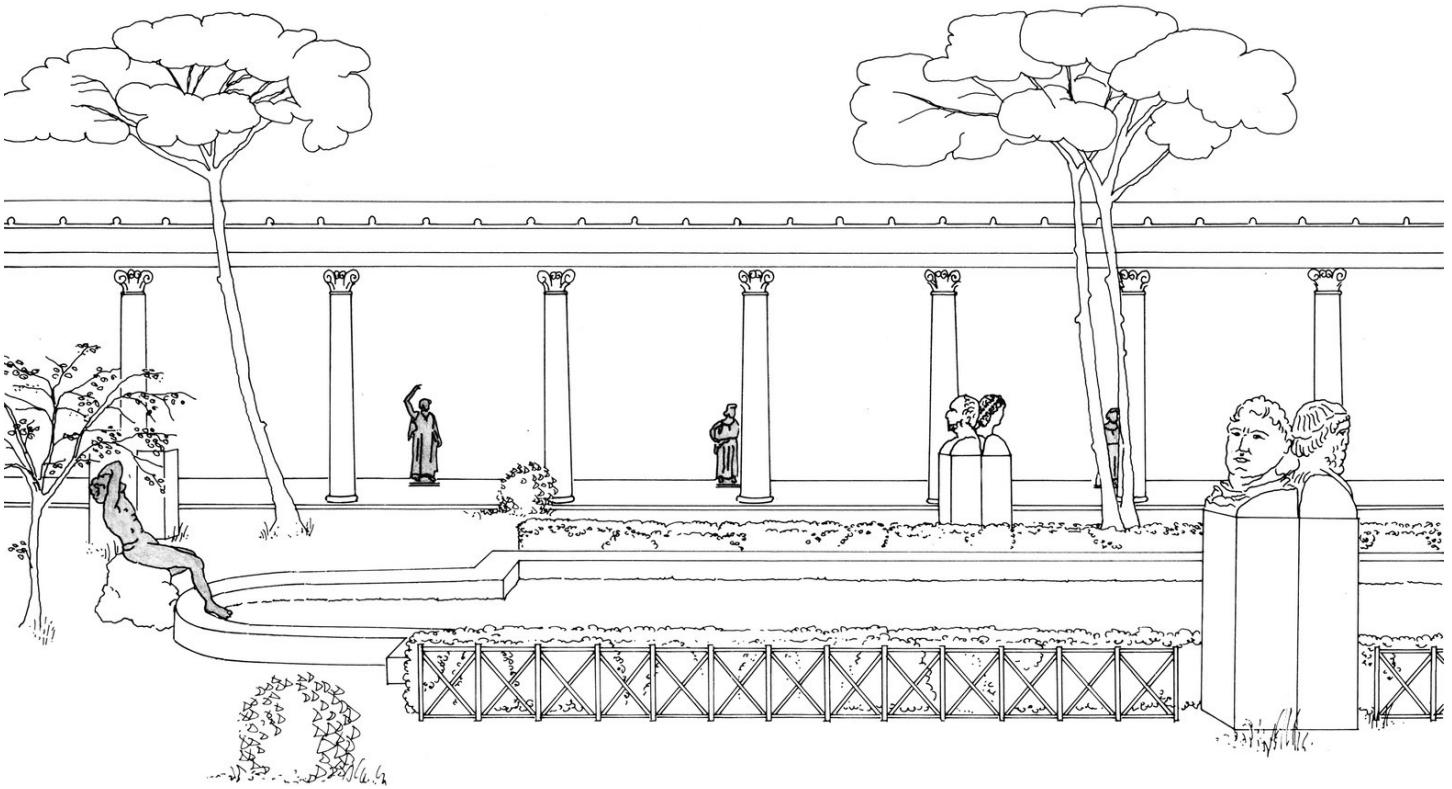


Figure 20.5 Herculaneum, Villa of the Papyri, layout showing the distribution of sculptures.

Drawing: Richard Neudecker.

The extraordinary bronzeworks (which make up three-quarters of the entire discovery) emphasize the importance of the aesthetic qualities of surfaces for the evaluation of art (cf. Allen, [Chapter 8](#), this volume). Eyes made from ivory and stone inlays as well as lips and fabric patterns applied in copper give but a poor indication of how impressive the colors must once have been, and the warm glow of bronze was valued even more highly. A small peristyle in the villa's representative entrance area contained an assorted selection of bronze copies of heads on herm shafts that presented any visitor with the owner's cultural self-image, much like a collection of the owner's favorite citations might have. Failing this rather ambitious function, they at least served to put the visitor in the right mood for the rest of the house. The group of busts was a pictorial summary of all Hellenism and included Polykleitos' Doryphoros ([Figure 9.5](#)), a classical Amazon possibly by Phidias, and several other portraits that are nameless to us, but certainly represent outstanding figures in Greek scholarship, philosophy, and history. In the previously mentioned large peristyle, however, art and culture were presented in a more differentiated way. A large number of bronze statues of young girls stood in a portico exactly as votive statues would have in a Greek sanctuary. In addition, several bronze heads and busts were exhibited on herm shafts under the open sky. They are all copies of masterpieces that, based on their quality and the number of other surviving copies, must have been highly valued. Most of them depict heads of gods such as Heracles or Apollo. The latter has artfully twisted curls in imitation of an archaic style and was (either really or seemingly) cut off from a statue in such a way that the bust could be considered an old collector's item. Taken as a whole, especially when viewed from the porticos, the bronzes could evoke a Greek sanctuary. At close quarters, however, they could be examined and compared from an art-historical point of

view as examples of changing styles or works of specific artists, because the inscriptions on the bases prove beyond doubt that these pieces were prestigious works of art: the Villa of the Papyri yielded the signature of Apollodoros of Athens, who created the copy of the Doryphoros and doubtless, in so doing, a masterpiece (cf. [Figure 9.5](#) and Squire, [Chapter 9](#), this volume).

Spaces for art and religion could intermingle. In the middle of one wing of the small peristyle, in a location that was prominent for both the guests and the property owner, a colonnade housing a marble statue of Athena opens up as though it were leading into a small temple. The statue was gold plated and designed in an archaic style, so that it must have glowed like a cult image in the darkness of the room. Yet it too is only a Roman copy of a Greek original that stood on the Athenian Acropolis. For any educated visitor, the copy referred to this most Greek of places and at the same time it transformed the room itself, the tablinum, into a sacred space. In his house, Brutus had stored his family tree in what he called a “Parthenon,” and the Villa of the Papyri housed its most intimate sculptures in the same room; namely, portraits of the family and of certain philosophers.

According to Cicero and Statius, intellectual and historical heroes were present in any cultivated person’s villa, and their names were of course also frequently vocalized while reading aloud. Their portraits were therefore an integral part of the artistic furnishing of a villa. As Pliny wrote (*Natural History* 35.9–10), one simply wanted to know what the people had looked like, whose undying spirits filled the villas and their libraries. It is thus no surprise that portraits were also invented for those heroes of old that entirely lacked traditional facial features, as was the case with Homer.

In the Villa of the Papyri, this “bliss,” as Pliny called it, took on various forms. Two parallel rows of eight marble portrait herms lined a water basin in the large peristyle. The portraits depict great thinkers such as Panyassis, generals such as Archidamus, and Hellenistic rulers such as Pyrrhus, with Athena inserted among them. Given that the names of most of the portraits are unknown to us, the criteria for their selection remain unclear. The marble work is, in any case, of moderate quality. The portrait gallery along the basin in the middle of the garden was probably intended to be viewed in its entirety from the distance of the portico and not appraised in detail.

Other marble herm galleries consisting of luminaries of the Greek past were erected in the second century CE in two extensive villas near Tivoli (Palma Venetucci 1992). Here, the herm shafts bore detailed inscriptions, so we know their composition: the Seven Sages are followed by statesmen, philosophers, orators, poets, scholars, and even artists such as Phidias. The Greek inscriptions were executed with almost calligraphic care. The herms thereby formed a kind of marble pictorial encyclopedia in an educational landscape, which was made even more distinctive by a circle of statues of the muses. The hills around Rome were thus transformed into Mount Helicon, sacred to the muses. A poem on a herm in a modest *villa suburbana* outside Rome praised a small muse grove containing a pair of portrait herms and colorful flowers (Neudecker 1988, 146). The claim that the muses were present seems slightly excessive, but it arose from the owner’s authentic enjoyment in being able to stroll around in

an atmosphere that was appropriate to the way he saw himself, just like Cicero, who worked in a garden exedra under the gaze of a bust of Plato (*Brutus* 24). In the later second century CE, Bruttius Praesens, from the upper tiers of the aristocracy, owned a villa in the Sabine mountains that also included a grove in which marble muses assembled (Neudecker 1988, 69). Two further lifesized and extremely dynamic statues depicted a poet and a singer (one represents Anacreon) performing in their midst. The high quality of Hellenistic sculpture contributed to making the scene credible.

Despite their recourse to an established canon of cultural education, these displays were also shaped by the personal predilections of the villa owner. Such preferences become apparent, for instance, where owners could not bear to be parted from the objects of their veneration and made them portable. This applies especially to portraits of those Greek authors whose books were continuously read. All in all, eight small-scale bronze busts of philosophers and other writers were found in several places in the Villa of the Papyri, where they had apparently been placed momentarily. Almost without exception, these bronzes are of very high quality. The small-scale art described in literary texts appears to have been the most highly valued. Allegedly, they had all been made by one of the three most famous sculptors of antiquity, or had been previously owned by Alexander at the very least. Presumably, all the owners of such bronzes of high quality in our museums were dreaming of such famous names. They were particularly fond of the visual effects of the shiny metal surfaces, and thus invented stories of special alloys that had of course to be particularly ancient and could only possibly have been made in ancient Corinth. These so-called *Corinthia* thus combined several criteria of artistic quality; namely, old age, famous previous owners, and aesthetic appeal. Only a few of these precious pieces can be assigned to villa inventories. Among them are two small bronzes with silver appliqué from the Villa of the Papyri. They were found in the atrium, the most representative room of the house that every villa owner used to present both himself and his wealth in any conceivable art form, and to relish his own glory.

Weapons and other trophies in atria of the Republican period may have been pure military objects; they, too, became subjects of artful pictorial representations. In the Villa of the Mysteries, they copied Hellenistic friezes, and golden Macedonian shields adorned the walls as masterpieces of illusionistic painting and joined the splendid wall paneling and luxury materials of the Second Style. The atria also always contained furniture of the highest quality, specifically the figuratively decorated marble tables that were used to display small but precious pieces of art, and accordingly bore the Greek names of *Trapezai* and *Delphici* (cf. Sinn, [Chapter 16](#), this volume).

All of these in combination created an atmosphere of elegance and wealth in the atrium in which the Roman portraits of the family's ancestors must have looked remarkably out of place. However, after the aristocratic villa owners adopted the Hellenistic sovereigns as their "real" ancestors, other portraits began to appear on the walls: bronze likenesses of the Ptolemaic and Seleucid rulers looked out from the niches in the atrium of the Villa of the Papyri.

Display contexts and idiosyncrasies

The discovery of the Villa of the Papyri is a warning against the desire to examine the meaning of individual works of art without knowledge about their original context. It shows that the ways in which specific pieces were perceived depended on certain visual axes, with the result that their meaning was not always clearly defined; wall niches are but one way of displaying art, after all. Hadrian's Villa near Tivoli is very enlightening in this respect, because no other Roman villa has yielded so much well-preserved art (Aurigemma 1961; Raeder 1983; Salza Prina Ricotti 2001). Unfortunately, we know little about the actual display contexts, with the exception of one very informative case.

Among the names given to separate areas of the villa according to written sources, such as *academia* or *stoa poikile*, is a conspicuous so-called *Canopus*. The original Canopus was a waterway near Alexandria that was famous for its cultic sites as well as its boisterous parties. The villa's Canopus was a long basin in Hadrian's villa that featured a marble crocodile emerging from the water at one end ([Figure 20.6](#)). The terrifying Scylla slaughtering Odysseus' companions rose on a small island on the other end. Nonetheless, the two sculptures have nothing to do with one another. The crocodile greeted arriving guests in the sunshine, while the dark marble Scylla was admired at the evening banquets in the semi-circle of an adjoining nymphaeum. All the other sculptures that surrounded the basin were, however, hardly visible from there, and merged into a featureless line. They became more clearly visible only when the viewer was walking along the basin under the portico or pergola. In doing so, he would have encountered an ensemble of figures supporting the architrave of the portico. This ensemble is a curious assemblage of copies of the korai of the Erechtheion in Athens and architrave-bearing Papposileni. The best known sculptures from a famous site (the Athenian Acropolis in this case) were thus used to create a souvenir in the villa that no longer had anything to do with the conditions of the original set-up. The ensemble almost became akin to the motif on a postcard. While the back sides of the original korai were almost impossible to see, the viewers of their copies here in the villa had to make do with their unsightly backs unless they walked around to the opposite side of the pool to look at their nice fronts. What matters are the viewer's position and perspective. The edge of the semicircular end of the pool is accompanied by the delicate architecture of arches and architraves supported by a row of columns that frames further marble statues. They, too, are copies of classical masterpieces such as Ares and Amazons that appear as an art gallery from further away, but expose their unsightly backs on closer inspection. The sculptures must therefore have been intended to be viewed from fixed resting places and paths.



Figure 20.6 Tivoli, Hadrian's Villa, view of sculptures by the Canopus.

Photo: Richard Neudecker.

This is how the display of the sculptures in the large peristyle of the Villa of the Papyri was “programmed” (Figure 20.2). The plants surrounding the statues of animals, demigods, and athletes in the garden area will have ensured that, from various points, one piece or another was always visible. Four statues of poets and orators were positioned in front of the peristyle columns in such a way that they were quite difficult to see from the inside. They were meant to be viewed from the porticos, ideally from the far opposite end, so that they looked as if they had just emerged from the peristyle deep in conversation. It was a chance observation of this kind that induced Cicero to make the joke cited earlier about his philosophical gardeners. The idea was to create a regular sequence by arranging them against columns. Columns are favorite fixed points for statuary displays because they provide an optical anchor, just like the rows of trees in Oplontis. Given that they could also be used to mark semi-open boundaries between the inside and the outside, rows of columns were also an essential architectural element in gardens despite their high cost—a good column cost more than a statue. In the same way, fences with herm poles alongside water basins were used to structure or emphasize space. Accordingly, they were often used when a gallery of portraits was supposed to look particularly long. For those taking a walk inside the portico, the alternating sequence of columns and herms created an interesting rhythm in their perception of the garden.

All forms of art and fine craftsmanship interacted to transform the space called the “villa” into a work of art in its own right. Wind and water, birds and flower scents, and various activities also contributed to this transformation. The result was what Statius lauds as an ideal interplay

of art, nature, and atmosphere. Unfortunately, we are unable to write about much besides the sculptures in the villa, and must also be aware that our perception of these sculptures is reduced in museums. It lacks the color, lines of sight, arrangements with plants, water, and so on. Artificial lighting cannot replace sunlight or torchlight. Sensory stimulus was the primary expectation made of sculpture, which led to admiration for the most natural surfaces and the most lifelike subjects, the highest artistic criterion.

The impression of a villa world filled primarily with statues is not entirely correct. A painting was always more highly esteemed among works of art; it is the only medium that had separate rooms reserved exclusively for it. In late Republican and early imperial wall paintings, representations of panel paintings with open shutters such as those from the *villa suburbana* under the Villa Farnesina in Rome (Mols and Moormann 2008) are reminiscent of such precious items, whereas the small genre paintings of still lifes and erotic symplegmata are but a distant echo of them. Wall paintings of certain subjects, such as seascapes or vistas of villas, were considered to be of such high quality that Pliny records the names of their inventors and masters in the same breath as those of the Greek masters (*Natural History* 35.116–117, 120).

During the Republican era, mosaic must have been an important medium of pictorial art, as is indicated by several examples of copies of Greek master paintings in an awesome exhibition in a residential house in Pompeii, the House of the Faun (Zevi 1998; cf. [Figure 6.2](#)). The so-called Villa of Cicero near Pompeii provides us with a unique example of a surviving mosaic emblem from a *villa suburbana* that is signed by its artist. The triumph of the mosaic image as an independent art form and genre of villa decoration began in the second century CE. It appeared first and in the highest quality in the dining halls, where all forms of art were generally concentrated. Most of the sculptures were viewed already on the way to the banquet rooms, and frequently they were arranged in such a way that they could be favorably seen from within. Yet conversations about art are likely to have focused more on the objects right in the participants' own hands: their drinking vessels. Fanatical art collectors rightly considered toreutics a highlight of craftsmanship (cf. Lapatin, [Chapter 17](#), this volume). It is significant that, even in the houses of Pompeii, the lamp and tray bearers in the banquet rooms counted among the artistically most valuable bronze statues. The effect of all of this mute art was enhanced by theatrical, musical, and dance performances that may not always, but will occasionally, have been art themselves. In a similar way, the effect of all of the artistic genres combined was enjoyed during visits to the garden and moments of repose. However, if we look at the wider context of the villa as a place for pleasure, the significance of art diminishes somewhat. Besides the location of the villa, the comfort of the internal arrangement of its rooms, the smooth functioning of its inner workings, the splendor of its surfaces achieved by the use of the best materials, figurative art, with its visual stimuli, provided an important but by no means the only delight for the senses. As in all other spheres of villa life, bad taste and the excesses of luxury were loudly criticized, but no one ever came up with an alternative way of making the world more beautiful for the rich.

The Roman villa in Italy became the location of high aesthetic and artistic standards through the import of Greek culture and cultural assets. It soon represented the context within the Roman world that was most clearly prepared for the enjoyment of art of all genres. It became a

successful concept for personally designed environments that slowly but surely began to influence also the lower social classes. Paul Zanker showed this using residential Pompeian houses that were meant to become like villas and thus took on the essential elements of their décor in reduced and referential forms.

Villas in the provinces

The model proved hard to export to the Empire's provinces. In the imperial period we find a number of *villae maritimae* in northern Africa that kept to the climatically more pleasant coastal areas. However, floor mosaics with figurative images clearly came to prevail in their artistic design very quickly. From the second century CE onwards, a number of villas on the Iberian Peninsula did indeed have statuary décor, but it mainly consisted of small-scale sculptures. To avoid listing all of the provinces with ultimately disappointing results, it may be more beneficial to anticipate the final outcome. Despite the scale and splendor of villas outside of Italy, the display of works of art never became a necessary component there. In retrospect, this may shed some light on the particular historical circumstances of *otium* that led to the appearance of the *villa urbana*, which had to be within easy reach of Rome and be linked with Italy's unique landscape, charged with Greek mythology.

A few exceptions, such as the large-scale villas of Chiragan and Luku, are nevertheless enlightening. The Chiragan villa in southern France was built in the early imperial period and filled over centuries with sculptures, first from Italy and then from the Greek east (Bergmann 2007). There are no thematic or qualitative differences from the discoveries in Italy. However, there is no original context for the more than 100 finds either. The only convincing conclusion to be drawn from them, and from the portraits in particular, is that the villa's owners were members of the Roman elite. The same applies to the villa of Luku on the Peloponnese, which belonged to the family of Herodes Atticus, who extended it in the mid-second century CE and furnished it with art (Spyropoulos 2001). The large number of sculptures that were found at Luku is not worthy of particular attention on its own, particularly given that the precise contexts of the finds are unknown there as well. More interesting, however, is the high proportion of Greek originals, and particularly the presence of votive and funerary reliefs that had been completely removed from their original contexts and, along with a number of ancient originals, could be explained by a general enthusiasm for antiquities. The literary reports about Herodes Atticus are extraordinarily precise with regard to the millionaire's character and idiosyncrasies, and indicate how he acted out his mental health problems exclusively within the atmosphere of his villa and in his peculiar handling of sculptures. Such concrete interpretations cannot be gained from archaeological discoveries alone, but the case of Luku does give an impression of the extent to which the villa had also become a living space for the realization of one's personality through an interior full of art.

Ever since research into Roman villas began, there has been hope of gaining direct access to ancient living environments. Scholars willingly took up anything that pointed toward the identity of an owner and attempted to reconstruct everything from his everyday life to his psychogram. The fact that such interpretations are often made obsolete by changes in modern trends and interests should not prevent us from continuing to search for possible ways to

explain archaeological monuments with the aid of their creators. The living conditions of the emperors are usually easier to reconstruct, as their residences have been securely identified. Accordingly, the country residences of the emperors—be they newly excavated like the Villa Magna (Fentress, Maiuro, and Goodson 2010), partially re-excavated like Tivoli, or previously neglected complexes like Baiae or Posillipo (Valenti 2008)—have enormous potential for the analysis of the intricate interplay of art, residence, and everyday life.

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Among those syntheses of Roman architecture that include chapters on the villa, Gros (2001) provides a good overview with many ideas and images. For the history of scholarship, see Drerup's (1959) brief summary. Percival (1976) and Burke (1978) concentrate on the cultural history of the British villa. Rind (2009) deals exclusively with northern Africa and Fernández Castro (1982) with Spain.

Regional studies such as Adams (2006 and 2008) and Marzano (2007) are usually necessary to answer specific questions concerning sociological or economic aspects; they focus on the peculiarities of the *suburbanum*, as does Santillo Frizell and Klynne (2005). Smith (1997) deals with this topic across several regions.

Detailed studies of the display of art usually only concern isolated pieces. Bartman (1988), however, summarizes the phenomenon of duplication and sequencing of statues. Specific questions of art history are likewise always discussed in case studies. See Vorster (1998) for the early phase of the reception of Hellenistic art in the Italian villa. Neudecker's (1988) survey of 78 villas with sculptural decorations focuses on Italy, and enables easy access to particular discoveries and questions by grouping the material thematically. It also compiles the literary documentation and contextualizes it within the cultural history.

Individual villa-specific architectural forms are addressed by Dunbabin (1996), who focuses on banquet spaces, and Krause (2000), who investigates apsidal halls; working from what are known as Pliny the Younger's villa letters, Förtsch (1993) discusses a wealth of architectural forms that are typical of the villa and its decoration.

Nature in any of its manifestations is an enduring theme in the villa. Grimal (1969) will always be indispensable for the discussion of the fundamental literary evidence; the essays in MacDougall (1987) offer more recent archaeological insights into garden design; Schneider (1995) addresses nature as a constitutive factor in the villa as a living space.

Although the numerous anthologies on the villa are usually repetitive, interesting insights can be gained from Ciardiello (2007) on the Gulf of Naples and Frazer (1998) on general aspects of *villeggiatura*.

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CHAPTER 21

The Decoration of Private Space in the Later Roman Empire

Susanne Muth

A Field of Research Is Discovered

Late imperial and late antique interior decoration has only been discovered as a research topic in the past few decades. Classical archaeology long viewed this period, the third to fifth centuries CE, as a time of cultural decline. Accordingly, late imperial houses and villas were mainly considered as evidence of the decadence and decline of ancient culture, and from this perspective it was impossible for them to raise much interest. Instead, research into Roman interior decoration concentrated on discoveries from earlier periods: the late Republic and the early and high imperial periods (first century BCE to second century CE). From a different perspective, it also failed to arouse much interest at first: unlike classical archaeology, late antique and Christian archaeology did concentrate on exploring late imperial culture, but primarily focused on the phenomena of the cultural shift that accompanied the arrival of the new Christian culture. Churches and tombs were seen as informative in this regard; houses and villas less so because they seemed to adhere firmly to the traditions of the previous culture of pagan antiquity. So, while late imperial interior decoration was insufficiently representative of antiquity for one discipline, it was too representative of it for the other. Caught between these two approaches, late imperial interior decoration went unnoticed among scholars for a long time.

That changed in the 1970s, however, and even more so in the 1980s and 1990s, as research on late imperial residential architecture became an increasingly dynamic field of research. During the course of classical archaeology's general reorientation as a decidedly historical and cultural-historical discipline, the late imperial period was "discovered" as an important and exciting era. Where the complicated nature of late imperial culture, with its interaction between traits of cultural tradition, transformation, and innovation, had previously been an impediment, it was now precisely this nature that commanded growing interest. Classical archaeology increasingly began to examine the processes that transformed the cultural phenomena of antiquity into those of late antiquity. This quickly drew interior decoration into the center of the debate; after all, it was one of the sectors of cultural life in (late) antiquity in which classical phenomena seem to have been handed down and continuously transformed for a particularly long time. Late antique and Christian archaeology also began to explore the complex character of that era and its mixture of old pagan and new Christian culture; here as well, residential architecture suggested itself as a starting point.

At the same time, research on late imperial domestic architecture benefited from the fundamental reorientation of the field. As in other areas of archaeological research, questions

of cultural history increasingly moved to the foreground, illuminating the material evidence particularly from the perspective of patrons and viewers, revealing it as a means of communication and representation, and attempting to gain a better understanding by investigating its concrete integration into spatial and ritual contexts. From this contextual perspective, late imperial interior decoration proved particularly promising. The numerous surviving *domus* (urban houses) and *villae* (country estates), with their various parts dedicated to different functions and rituals (reception, feasts, relaxation, representation, and so on), allowed scholars to distinguish between various levels of social interaction and communication. It was subsequently possible to investigate the architectural and decorative designs of the living space: on the one hand, to explore how different kinds of domestic space were designed for different kinds of social activity; on the other, to investigate the extent to which this was itself determined by architectural and decorative means—above all, through the use of painting and mosaics. Material culture and the spatial contexts in which it was displayed could consequently be explored in terms of each other—and in a way that had rarely been possible in the larger field of (classical) archaeology.

Since its inception, research on late imperial interior decoration has looked at the materials from various perspectives. The combination of these perspectives has slowly shaped a comprehensive view of the structures of the late imperial house. One approach proceeds from the organization of the domestic spaces as a whole. Individual residences, *domus* or *villae*, are examined as to how their spatial and functional structure was reflected and communicated through various forms of architectural or decorative arrangements (e.g., Darmon 1980; Wilson 1983; Muth 2005). Where are the areas for reception and representation located? And how is the viewer's perception of the different spaces affected by the architecture and its decoration? At the same time, other studies concentrate on individual types of rooms (e.g., banquet rooms and reception halls: Thébert 1987; Ellis 1988, 1991, and 1997; Scott 1997) and attempt to analyze the internal structures of the architectural and decorative design of these functional room types.

Another approach starts from the forms of decorative design chosen for interior decoration. Its main focus is on floor mosaics and wall painting, but it also encompasses sculptures. It attempts to investigate the various forms of decoration in terms of their potential for functionally defining the living space, as well as evoking an ideal living environment. Particularly noteworthy is the image decoration, which is known to us primarily from floor mosaics and, to a lesser extent, wall paintings. The selection of themes and subjects is understood as a reflection of social values and dream worlds: a room's imagery was selected according to themes appropriate to the discourse that the residents wanted to encounter in that particular space. Some studies analyze the entire thematic spectrum of these images and examine their quantitative and spatial distribution as well as their diachronic development (e.g., Dunbabin 1978; Ling 1991 and 1998); other studies concentrate more on individual themes within that spectrum and seek to evaluate their significance and meaning (e.g., Schneider 1983; Parrish 1984; Raeck 1992; Muth 1998 and 2001).

Besides this interest in images and their iconography, studies of the formal and stylistic design of individual decorative media are also becoming increasingly popular. With time, research

into a more substantial body of evidence (including some new discoveries) has made it possible to reconsider old models of stylistic development and established chronologies, which had to be extensively modified and corrected, frequently resulting in later dates for individual contexts. These new insights into the formal structures of design led primarily to a better understanding of the stylistic pluralism of decorative media in the late imperial era, which also gave rise to new research questions: now differences in formal design could no longer be exclusively interpreted as diachronic indicators of an evolving style; they could also be seen as synchronic phenomena of a differentiated characterization of rooms, in which the divergence in the formal design of mosaics and wall paintings especially reflected the differences in the functional and social organization of space within the house (see the next section).

All in all, research since the 1980s and 1990s has resulted in a number of new, exciting, and sometimes surprising insights into the interior decoration of the late imperial era. These insights contradict the old prejudice of an ancient culture in decline that had become increasingly inflexible in its fixation on empty quotations, due to the growing distance from its own cultural tradition. It is clear now that the opposite is true, for what is emerging is an unfalteringly vibrant and dynamic way of living that is remarkable in its immensely productive acquisition and further development of the features of the Roman culture that preceded it.

Comparisons with Roman interior decoration of the previous centuries are therefore crucial for a historical understanding of late imperial interior decoration. More recently, progress has been made in this respect by discussing interior decoration diachronically from the Republic to the late imperial era (e.g., McKay 1975; Thébert 1987; Ellis 2000). This approach has revealed how strongly late imperial residential architecture draws on the tradition of the second and early third centuries CE. Only against this background can the degree of consistency and innovation that is characteristic of late imperial interior decoration be precisely defined. What is particularly illuminating here is that the fundamental historical and social changes that followed the Tetrarchy and the rule of Constantine I do not seem to be reflected in the domestic lifestyle (see the later discussion). The interior decoration of that period reveals a far more complex situation, with innovation and stability operating simultaneously and in vibrant and mutual exchange with one another. Closer examination of this situation is one of the central goals of current research into late imperial houses; it is also an important part of research on the late imperial era in general, as information gained from interior decoration contributes significantly to our understanding of the society of late antiquity as a whole. Furthermore, it also provides significant insights into the often-discussed cultural changes between antiquity and late antiquity.

It is this question that I want to discuss in the following, namely what changed and what stayed the same in the domestic culture of late antiquity; what the results contribute to our understanding of late imperial culture in general; and what potential the approach has for future research. The decorative design of living space, which proves to be particularly instructive in this matter, is the main focus here and will be approached from two perspectives. On the one hand, we will examine decoration for its traditions and changes, taking a closer look at both the decorative system of the house and the thematic spectrum of domestic images. On the other

hand, we will attempt to fathom the degree of tension between innovation and consistency in the domestic culture of the late imperial era. Were there any fundamental changes? If so, where and when did they occur? And what conclusions can we draw from them for our understanding of late imperial society and culture?

How Does Decoration Function in the Roman House?

In order to understand the decoration of late imperial houses, it is important to understand the basic functions of interior decoration within the Roman house in general. What is the purpose of decoration? How was it used and where was there potential for variation and change?

The space inside a Roman house is defined on three levels (although in reality these levels are not distinct, but overlap and interact): as a space of action, a space of discourse, and a space of social hierarchy. Decoration contributes to the awareness of a room's character on all three levels.

The house as a place of action

An initial, functional distinction separates transitional rooms as spaces of movement and transition (e.g., *vestibulum*, *porticus*, corridor, antechamber) from spaces that were designed to be lived in, spaces that were the destinations of movement and accommodated the interactions central to the house (e.g., *oecus*, *triclinium*, *cubiculum*). Decoration was used to emphasize these basic functional differences (Scott 1997, 61; Muth 1998, 61–63). In transitional rooms, it allowed the viewer to move without interruption, partly with the aid of floor mosaics that quickly guided the viewer's gaze forward with small tiling patterns and seemingly endless repetitions of the same, rather simple motifs. In the actual living spaces, on the other hand, decoration helped to center the gaze on the interior of the room. Here, floor mosaics featured complicated, large-scale, and centered compositions, sometimes with figurative scenes at the center, intended to draw the viewers' attention and keep them in the room. Transitional areas and subdividing spaces such as the antechambers to large reception rooms can also be identified due to changes or caesuras in the floor decoration, which would briefly delay viewers and might even redirect them as needed. This close proximity of distinct compositional forms that subliminally determine the viewers' perception, and therefore their action and movement depending on the spatial situation, characterizes every mosaic arrangement in Roman domestic spaces (cf. [Figure 19.8](#)). One example is the House of the Triumph of Neptune in Acholla, Tunisia, which has a mosaic design dating to the second century CE ([Figure 21.1](#); Gozlan 1992; Dunbabin 1999, 310–311): the floor plan that includes the mosaics clearly shows the structure of the different compositional principles and their implementation within the various groups of functionally similar rooms. Similar simple strategies to guide movement were also used in wall or ceiling decoration, but unfortunately we have only very few surviving late imperial examples (for earlier evidence, see Ling, [Chapter 14](#), this volume).

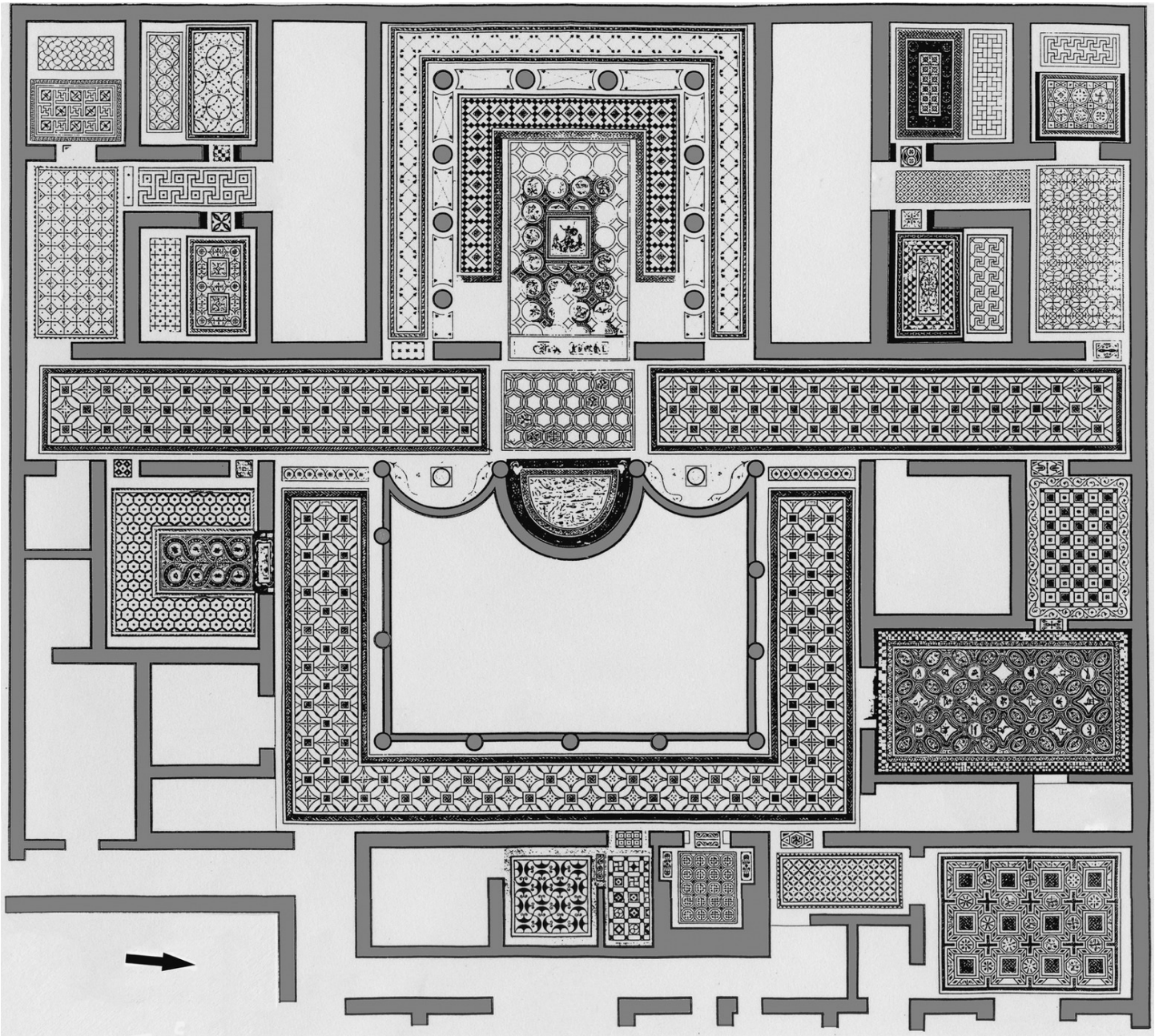


Figure 21.1 Acholla, House of the Triumph of Neptune, floor plan with mosaic features.

Plan: S. Muth, based on S. Muth, *Erleben von Raum—Leben im Raum* (Heidelberg, 1998), pl. 48 fig. 2.

Apart from these basic forms of spatial definition, decoration can also refer more concretely to specific actions that occur in the spaces concerned (Dunbanin 1999, 310–313; Muth 1998, 67–68). Banquet rooms, for example, include wall or mosaic images depicting scenes of feasting or still lifes of food; reception rooms can likewise be adorned with mosaics that show visitors and guests being welcomed and invited in. The imagery thus picks up real situations and transfers them into an imaginary world. In doing so, the decoration emphasizes the main purpose of the space and allows visitors to identify it even before they have personally experienced its function.

Living space as a place of discourse

Pictorial representations in the house usually go beyond simply depicting scenes of real life: the themes that they show evoke ideas that suit the particular room and the actions that occur within it. The images thus create a discursive or ambient environment that envelops viewers and influences their perception and actions accordingly (Scott 1997; Ling 1998, 120–121; Muth 1998, 68–70). Images on banquet room walls or floors can therefore evoke notions of wealth and a life of luxury, an abundance of food, or the exuberance of a cheerful and carefree life—visions that are certainly suited to the boisterous and magnificent feasts that could take place in such rooms. More serious themes of social status and prestige, on the other hand (e.g., the *dominus* as a villa owner, as the host of games, or as an aristocratic hunter), are addressed in the images of representational spaces. Images in spaces designated for more private relaxation or in baths can illustrate visions of carefree, cheerful, and perhaps even erotically charged frolicking, usually conveyed through mythical protagonists such as *erotes*, satyrs and nymphs, or mythical sea creatures such as sea centaurs and Nereids. Just as users not only perceive the room through their actions but are also influenced by the complex discursive environment that envelops and accompanies those actions, the images in residential spaces also mostly attempt to illustrate a wide set of ideas that subliminally influence users' thoughts, perception, and actions—and thus define the space as a space of discourse in which they can engage.

Living space as a space of social hierarchy

Beyond concrete actions and discourse, the Roman house was also a stage for various forms of social interaction that were crucial for the manifestation of social standing and the representation of rank. Different social groups encountered one another in different parts of the house: on the one hand, this meant the *familia*—the *dominus* and his close family members, but also the domestic slaves; on the other hand, this also meant representatives of the public who interacted with members of the *familia* inside the house—guests and friends of the *dominus* with high social standing, as well as clients and other socially inferior members of the public. These different forms of social interaction between various protagonists took place in different parts of the house (for a basic introduction: Wallace-Hadrill 1988; for more on late antiquity: cf. Özgenel 2007): Members of a socially inferior general public, such as clients, encountered the *dominus* in the front part of the house (e.g., *atrium/tablinum*, *vestibulum*); by contrast, socially superior guests were invited further into the house, for instance for magnificent feasts with the *dominus* in the large representational rooms (e.g., *oecus*, *triclinium*); particularly close friends and trusted business colleagues could even be asked into the back areas of the house, which were of an even more private nature (e.g., the *dominus'* *cubiculum*). The specific location of the encounter within the house critically shaped the experience of social rank among the individuals meeting there. The spatial structure of the house was therefore also (or even primarily) characterized by social hierarchy. Interior decoration served to delineate different kinds of domestic space as sites for different kinds of social interaction. As a result, hierarchies of social space went hand in hand with hierarchies of decorative splendor: to see one's place in the decorative order of the house was simultaneously to experience one's standing in the social order operating behind it (Wallace-Hadrill 1988; Ling 1998, 115–117;

Dunbabin 1999, 306–310; Muth 1998, 63–67).

The house in Acholla with its mosaic designs may again serve as an example ([Figure 21.1](#)). The *vestibulum* on the east side and the portico around the peristyle feature geometric floor mosaics with a relatively simple repetitive composition and restrained polychromy. By contrast, the two larger reception rooms (*triclinia*) to the north and south of the peristyle display a complicated and more extravagant mosaic décor with far more varied colors and figural decoration. The large banquet room (*oecus*) to the west of the peristyle has an even more extravagant and precious mosaic decoration, with numerous smaller figurative images surrounding a larger mosaic tableau as a decorative highlight in the center (the room's great importance is adumbrated by the complicated mosaic décor in the entry area in the adjacent portico). In the increasingly private back part to the north of the *oecus*, several smaller rooms (*cubicula*) feature comparatively extravagant mosaic décor, which is, however, restricted to geometric and floral motifs. In this case, the relative splendor signifies spaces that were more private and socially restricted, such as the *cubicula* of the *dominus*. Other rooms, passage spaces as well as living spaces around the peristyle and in the more private back areas of the house, are decorated with relatively simple black-and-white geometric mosaics with repetitive patterns—and are consequently characterized as less important rooms within the hierarchical social structure of the house. As a viewer walked through the various rooms and saw the floor mosaics in light of their relative decorative extravagance, he would immediately have noticed the social position of a given room, the interactions that would occur within it, and the protagonists who would participate in those interactions. Other decorative media, primarily wall paintings (and ceiling decoration), were used in similar, complementary ways, as the early and high imperial houses found in the Vesuvian cities and in Rome impressively demonstrate.

With these three options for defining space on the three levels, the basic structures behind the functions of decorative domestic design have been adequately identified. These basic structures are consistent—and constitute a first basic constant in Roman residential architecture that endures well into late antiquity. There was, however, a certain leeway for variation when it came to the real manifestations of these basic structures. Various levels of splendor could be created by utilizing a variety of decorative means, and adjusted by the patron; the discourses that spaces evoked could be adapted to the interests of a particular set of values; and even the lines of sight and the movements of the visitors could be controlled by means of various strategies. Consequently, there was a potential for variation and change on all of these levels. It is obvious that this variability led to noticeable changes in the decorative systems of houses over the centuries. We will now take a closer look at these changes and examine how they can best be understood.

Changing Perspectives: Discovering a New Perception of Space

To start with, let us look at one of the best-known and best-preserved examples of late

imperial residential architecture: the late fourth century CE villa at Piazza Armerina on Sicily ([Figure 21.2](#); Wilson 1983; Dunbabin 1999, 131–143; Muth 2005). A comparison with the decorative system of earlier residential architecture soon exposes noticeable innovations. The first thing that stands out is the tremendous extravagance of the floor mosaics. As the floor plan of the villa and its floor mosaics shows, most of the rooms are decorated with figurative mosaics, and often large-scale tapestries even cover the entire floor of the room from wall to wall. The floor design indicates a marked increase in expense and luxury. The difference in mosaic design by comparison with earlier residential architecture, such as the house in Acholla, is obvious: while figurative images and mosaic tableaux were only sparingly used in the earlier house to ennoble certain rooms and demarcate the few socio-hierarchically significant spaces, this valuable form of mosaic is used almost excessively in the Piazza Armerina villa.

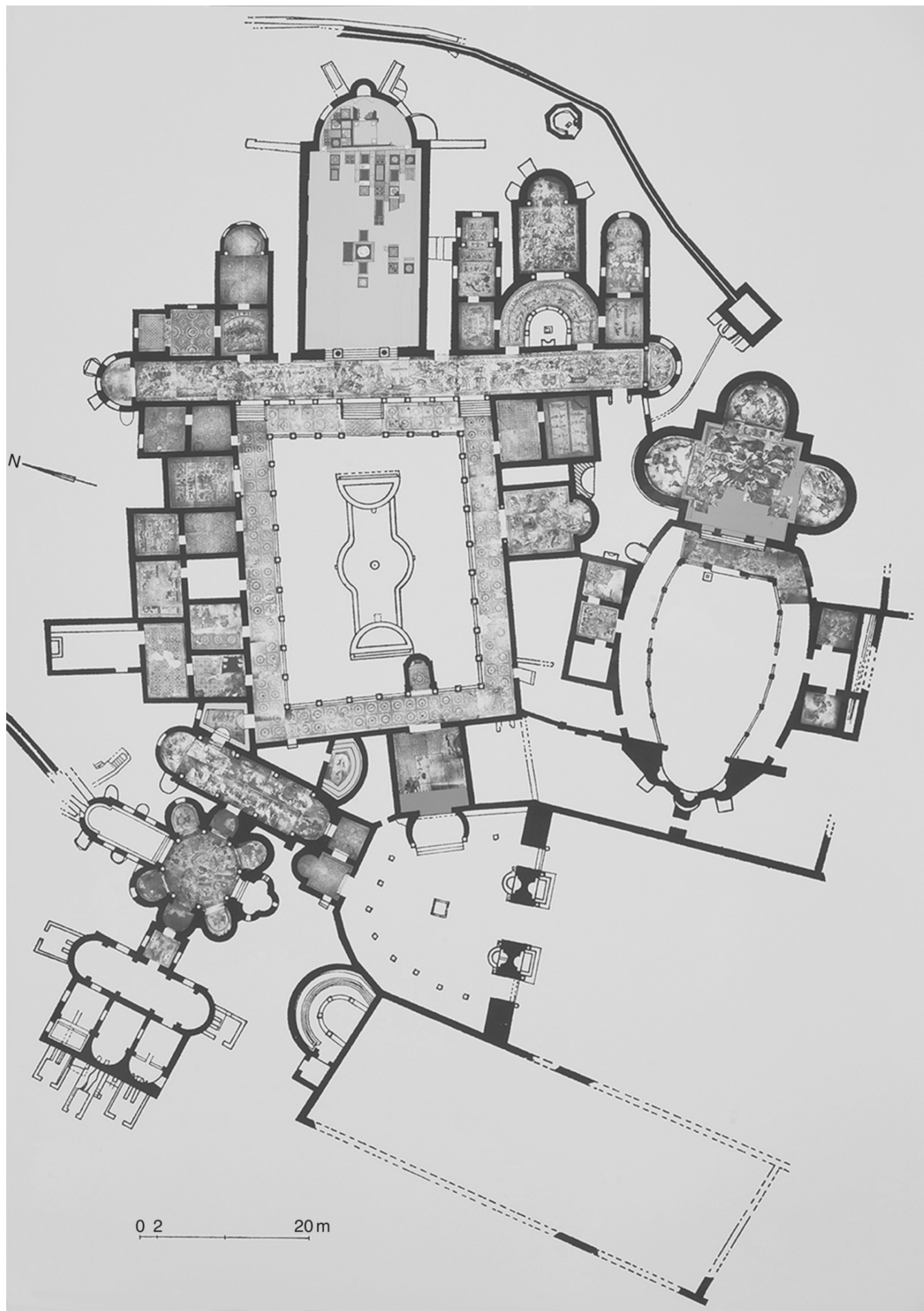
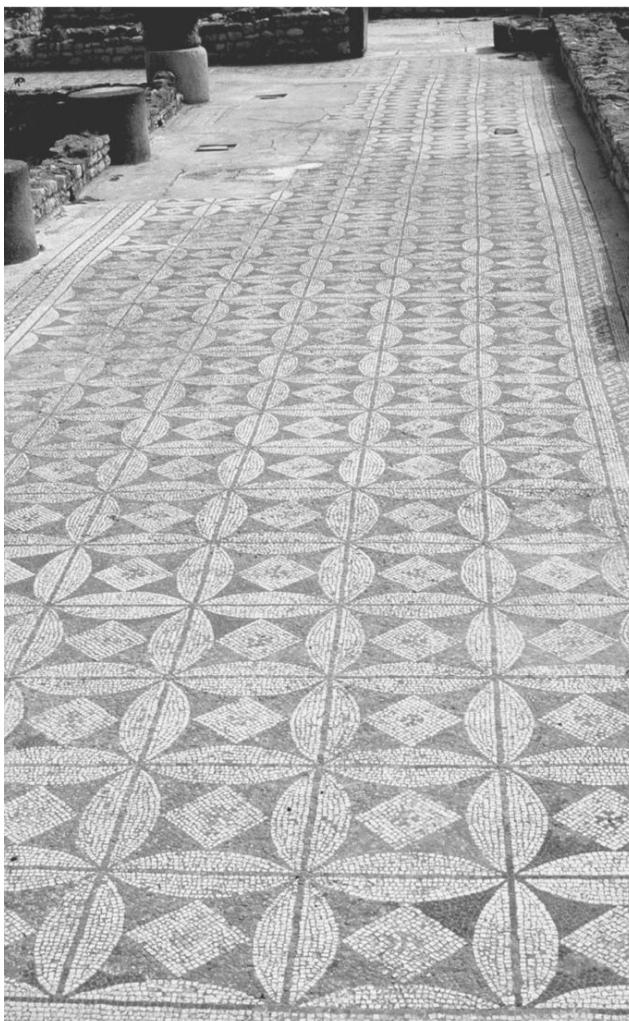


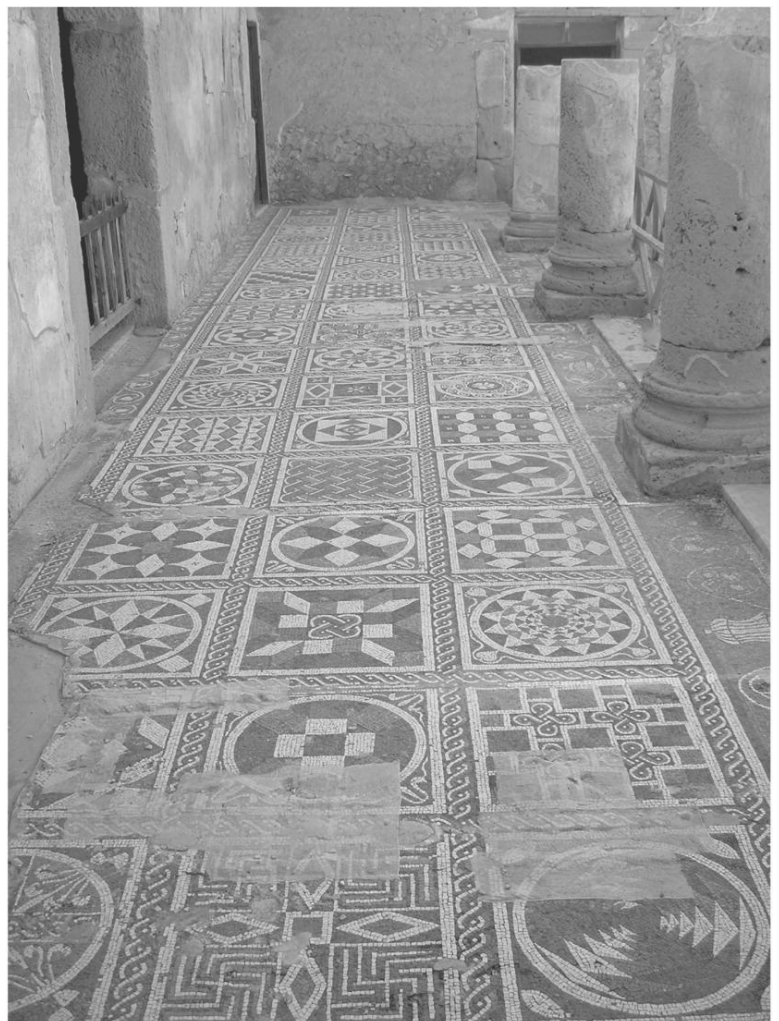
Figure 21.2 Villa of Piazza Armerina, floor plan with mosaic features.

Plan: S. Muth.

Such a turn toward fundamentally more extravagant floor mosaics is a universal feature of late imperial interior decoration. The Piazza Armerina villa is only a particularly rich example of this new trend in mosaic design, as mosaic images and large-scale mosaic tableaux now seem to be more common in other *villae* and *domus* as well. They are no longer limited to significant representational spaces, but can also adorn smaller rooms and even transitional rooms. Geometric mosaics also improve in quality and frequently display complicated compositions of interwoven shapes with extremely rich filling motifs and borderlines, often creating illusions of three-dimensionality. Here as well, the artists' effort and, thus, the financial value are more emphatically staged than was the case in conventional mosaic floors of the early and high imperial eras ([Figure 21.3](#) a–b; Dunbabin 1999, 293–296; Muth 1998, 79–80, 83–89).



(a)



(b)

Figure 21.3 Geometric mosaic compositions: (a) Thysdrus, late second/early third century; (b) Silin, third century.

Photo: S. Muth.

The increased decorative splendor on the floor is clearly connected to the simultaneous

changes in other forms of decoration. A comparison with wall painting will prove particularly enlightening here. Since the third century, illusionistic finesse and artistic extravagance in wall painting had been slowly declining; the murals in the Piazza Armerina villa clearly conform to this tendency. To the extent that the walls are decorated with painting, they are largely characterized by flatness and simplicity. Architectural prospects with their illusions of architectural space and even windows opening on magnificent views, which had been so popular in residential architecture of the early and high imperial periods (see Lorenz, [Chapter 13](#), this volume) are lacking in Piazza Armerina. Instead, simple arrangements of painted fields dominate, in which the individual panels mostly imitate rather plain marble incrustation. Individual figures sometimes appear in the panels, often facing the viewer. These, however, are always typical background figures, such as servants, *erotes*, children, satyrs, and nymphs, and are hardly ever engaged in more complex activities. Lavish scenes depicting independent and more complex activities, as were featured in the architectural prospects of early and high imperial walls, do not appear here. Instead, the figures on the walls in Piazza Armerina constitute an extension of the scenes that appear on the floor mosaics; the central activity takes place in the mosaic and is merely supplemented by the pieces of figurative décor orbiting it on the wall. Thus, the floor mosaic in a small room off the large peristyle in Piazza Armerina displays *erotes* in boats fishing and casting their nets; this theme is then picked up and continued by images of individual *erotes* in the panels on the surrounding walls, but without having an impact on the central scene or demanding any particular attention from the viewer. Isolated servants similarly adorn the walls in the villa's *vestibulum* ([Figure 21.4](#)). They too continue the theme of the floor mosaic, which shows servants in a festive reception scene greeting either the *dominus* or a visitor to the villa. The figurative decoration on the walls is thus only significant as a continuation of the pictorial decoration on the floor.



Figure 21.4 Villa of Piazza Armerina, reconstruction of the vestibulum.

Reconstruction: A. Müller, S. Muth, & D. Zombronner.

What appears in an extreme form in the villa in Piazza Armerina had already been emerging since the third century CE (Ling 1991, 186–197; Clarke 1991, 75–77, 340–361; Mielsch 2001, 107–138; Zimmermann and Ladstätter 2010, 164–172). The richly painted walls with architectural vistas gradually fell out of favor, while flatter wall decorations and restrained illusionism, such as walls with small-scale repeat patterns (wallpaper patterns) or imitations of marble incrustation (pseudo-veneer), became increasingly common, particularly after the turn from the third to the fourth centuries. Of course, this development was not entirely linear. The fourth century continued to produce walls that attempted to reference colonnaded architecture or displayed large-scale figurative representations. However, the substantial artistic effort required for such complex wall paintings that had once been standard practice was now increasingly becoming the exception.

There is an interesting development here with considerable significance for the perception of interior decoration. With the aid of their paintings' suggestive power, Roman walls had been denied their quality as two-dimensional wall surfaces for several centuries and had instead been disguised as three-dimensional spaces with protrusions and recesses (and even painted windows), which made the exact position of the walls delimiting the room visually hazy. In the late imperial period, a counter-movement slowly set in, causing the wall to be increasingly affirmed and experienced as a surface that defined the boundaries of a room. Interestingly, this change in wall decoration occurred in parallel with a change in floor decoration in the

opposite direction. In early and high imperial interior decoration, the simple and frequently only bichrome repetitive patterns stressed the mosaic floors' quality as even and accessible surfaces. Starting in the third century, the design of floor mosaics changed in favor of a gradually increasing preference for three-dimensional illusionism in their geometric compositions, and for figurative wall-to-wall images on other floors, which resulted in these floors being less perceptible as smooth and easily walkable surfaces. These two tendencies have an obvious causal relationship: the more suggestive the floor decoration, the more restrained the wall decoration. It is significant that this relationship between wall and floor decoration changed precisely during the late imperial era.

This fundamental change in the decorative system obviously had its consequences. Its effect on the way in which spaces were experienced was particularly serious, especially in the case of spaces where figurative images had been used. In early and high imperial interior decoration, it was the images on the walls (and the sculptures) that had primarily determined the imaginary world within the room, encountering the visitor at eye level. As the pictorial world of late imperial domestic architecture primarily unfolded on the floor, a new psychological game of cognitive spatial perception was opening up: the viewer literally entered and moved about in the scene that spread out in the mosaic under his feet, making him or her part of this imaginary world. This effect was further intensified in that the images on the walls extended those on the floor and helped to surround the viewer with the room's pictorial world on all sides. Image decoration in late imperial domestic spaces thus took on a new suggestive quality (Muth 2007, 349–350).

Archaeological sites with pictorial designs that specifically attempt to draw the viewer into a dialogue with the imaginary world show particularly well that such suggestively charged spaces were deliberately sought out as backdrops for daily life. The Piazza Armerina villa once again provides us with a good example: we have already been acquainted with the *vestibulum* with its servants in the reception scene on the wall and in the floor mosaic ([Figure 21.4](#)). The central floor mosaic is particularly noteworthy in that it depicts a number of expectant servants, but not the person they are welcoming (although the mosaic only survived in fragments, these fragments suffice to reconstruct the overall composition). The gaps in the imaginary world were inevitably filled by the real world: the room's real visitor inescapably became the object of festive expectation and greeting in that imaginary world. The borders between the real and imaginary worlds were slowly dissolved here. How appealing this game of blurring the boundaries really was for enhancing life in the villa is impressively exemplified by the large triconch hall in the same villa ([Figure 21.5](#)): in an enormous panorama, the floor mosaic in the central room depicts the defeated enemies of Heracles and Dionysus writhing pitifully and dying on the ground. Heracles and Dionysus, on the other hand, who should of course be indispensable parts of the scene, given that they are the victors and main protagonists of the events, are not shown. Here as well, the viewer is provoked by the imaginary world into considering himself a part of it—and taking on the role of the victorious hero or god triumphantly striding over the bodies of his victims—while walking across the floor mosaic. As though this were not already a sufficiently clever scenario, the bodies of the conquered giants are depicted on the floor mosaic in the central apse where the *dominus' stibadium*

(dining couch) stood—allowing the *dominus* to triumphantly stand in for the Olympian gods lording over their conquered enemies.



Figure 21.5 Villa of Piazza Armerina, reconstruction of the triconch.

Reconstruction: A. Müller, S. Muth, & D. Zombronner.

The power of such evocative images should not be underestimated. Let us consider that the restless light of candelabra was constantly dancing across the floor, and that the viewers of such images would be getting increasingly tipsy or even drunk. In such a situation, the images on the floor might quickly start to shift, writhe, and come alive—and the imaginary, mythical world on the floor may start to permeate the real world of the feasters more and more. By comparison, the arrangement of sculptures in the banquet hall of the villa at Baiae, which is based on the same idea but used other pictorial media, did not invite the viewer into its imaginary world with the same urgency ([Figure 20.3](#)). Ultimately, the fact that this potential for suggestive room design was only really discovered and fully implemented in the late imperial era (with tentative beginnings in the third century, and then more confidently in the fourth) was only possible due to the change in the dialogue between wall and floor decoration, and the shift of the main decorative focus from the vertical to the horizontal (on the consequences for statuary, see Muth 2007, 350–352).

Opportunities and Limitations: Increasing Decorative Splendor

The change in the decorative system also had impacts on other functions of interior decoration,

such as defining the social hierarchy of rooms or guiding lines of sight and movement. Because floor decoration was increasingly in search of musive splendor, new possibilities developed for articulating the rooms' positions in the social hierarchy of space. The spectrum of formal options in mosaic decoration expanded significantly, given that the old options of simpler decoration continued to be available. Simple geometric compositions with uncomplicated repeating black-and-white patterns, and large-scale polychrome mosaic tableaux with rich figurative images, were now the two extremes that defined the spectrum of decoration suited to the socio-hierarchical definition of space. This gave rise to a noticeable stylistic pluralism in the mosaic decoration of late imperial interior decoration, which should always be borne in mind when attempting to date floor mosaics by their style (Muth 1998, 84–89): a mosaic composition made up of, for example, a simple repeating black-and-white geometric pattern cannot be dated in isolation, because that style was in use throughout the imperial era. Such a composition can, however, be dated in the context of its room, given that the various styles were used for various types of socio-hierarchical spaces during different periods. Styles and motifs can therefore be dated by their contexts. While the simple repeating black-and-white mosaics of the first and second centuries CE were considered appropriate floor decoration for socially significant rooms (*triclinium*, *oecus*), in the third and fourth centuries they were increasingly used only as mosaic décor for less important spaces (e.g., passage spaces and rooms of lower social significance), and the newer styles were now deemed more suitable for the mosaic decoration of important rooms (for similar phenomena in wall painting, cf. Lorenz, [Chapter 13](#), this volume).

While the decorative spectrum of the floor mosaic was increasingly expanding, the possibilities for articulating the social hierarchy of spaces through floor decoration also increased, with the result that the significance of individual rooms could now be expressed in much finer grades. This potential was specifically pursued in late imperial interior decoration, and is particularly obvious in the decoration of those rooms that were more closely linked with the rituals of representative communication. While previously the important representational rooms such as *triclinia* or *oeci* (as the actual locations of such interactions) had been primarily emphasized, the passage spaces that guided the visitors to these rooms were now also coming into view. This can once again be exemplified in the villa at Piazza Armerina ([Figure 21.2](#)), where we find figurative mosaics as the dominant form of decoration in transitional rooms such as the portico around the peristyle, as well as the large corridor to its east; as we have seen, this kind of decoration had still been reserved for the more important representational spaces in the house in Acholla. The portico and corridor form the central transitional rooms through which the visitor would have walked to the large basilica, the most important representational hall in the Piazza Armerina villa. It is appropriately emphasized as part of a particularly important spatial sector by the figurative images in its mosaics. It is interesting to observe that the path through this transitional room became increasingly more representational the closer the visitor came to the basilica. The portico was still dominated by a geometric repeating composition with squares that contained interwoven garlands, which in turn featured figurative images as filler motifs; animal heads, in this case. As the visitor walked down the large corridor, the amount of figurative themes increased: an enormous mosaic spanned the entire length of the room's floor, showing wild animals being captured and caged for transport

to the arena. Because this kind of sumptuous mosaic was really only appropriate for representational halls, it indicated that this transitional room was in direct proximity to the basilica. Visitors would already have been mentally prepared for the ritual of representative interaction in the space and time that immediately preceded the actual ritual; they were thus put in the right mood for the ritual even before they actually entered the room.

This decorative ennoblement of porticos and corridors, however, also resulted in a redefinition of such transitional rooms: due to the increasing use of figurative mosaic decoration, they were now perceived more and more as discursive spaces, which had previously only really been true of the actual living spaces. In the example of Piazza Armerina, the mosaics in both transitional rooms feature themes (hunting, aristocratic status) that are also prominent in large representational rooms. In late imperial residential architecture, the representational discourse is therefore extended to larger and directly connected ensembles of rooms. This development also had its downsides, however. The greater splendor of the passage rooms and their use as extended discursive spaces also made it more difficult to guide a visitor's gaze and movement by means of floor decoration, because compositional principles were now being implemented that had previously been intended to concentrate that gaze and slow down movement in the actual living spaces. The villa at Piazza Armerina nonetheless clearly shows attempts to implement guiding motifs in both transitional rooms: in the portico by continually and consistently repeating certain individual motifs in the floor mosaic and certain figures on its walls; in the corridor by having the figures on the floor seemingly move in the direction that the visitor was also intended to take; namely, toward the entrance to the basilica. Nonetheless, it is clear that this extravagant room decoration will have drawn the visitor's attention much more than other, simpler forms. Transitional rooms and living spaces may thus have been less easy to tell apart than before.

Of course, the ever-increasing intensification of figurative extravagance could easily become a dangerous game to play. In the large representational rooms the owner had to strive for even more splendor, for an artistic climax that could be difficult to balance. In light of the suggestive power of these images, and the potential for distraction inherent in this rather obtrusive pictorial world, the imaginary and the real world could all too easily start vying for attention. This may have been an attractive prospect for rooms that accommodated livelier forms of social interaction, such as the triconch hall in Piazza Armerina. However, having to compete with the pictorial world may also have had a disruptive effect in rooms that were primarily used for representative rituals, such as the reception of visitors or the festive entrance of the *dominus*. Therefore, other forms of interior decoration were typically chosen for particularly significant representational spaces, as is shown by the Piazza Armerina basilica. Here, *opus sectile* floors and marble-incrusted walls take the place of figurative decoration in order to allow the real activities to reclaim center stage. Such a renunciation could be accepted all the more easily as one could effortlessly recall the suggestive pictorial world that had already been sufficiently developed in the adjacent transitional rooms. This is an illustrative example of how an increase in decorative extravagance sometimes had unforeseeable consequences for a room's definition and perception—and how, to some extent, the decorative system in late imperial residences may have ultimately reached its limits.

As we have seen, the main driving force behind all these changes was the increase in decorative splendor. As an instance of conspicuous consumption, it served to demonstrate the wealth and power of the *dominus* and to make known his claim to high social status. The increased use of precious materials shows the lasting interest that was directed toward it. The preference for *opus sectile* floors and marble-incrusted walls significantly increased yet again in the late imperial period (Ling 1991, 187; Dunbabin 1999, 254–268). Valuable and exotic colored marbles were particularly popular, and owners often preferred large-scale compositions, because larger and thinner marble slabs were all the more difficult and expensive to produce than smaller pieces. It is with good reason that precisely this form of decoration was chosen in, for example, the Piazza Armerina basilica, as another way of exceeding the lavishness of the rich figurative mosaic tableaux in the antechamber. The rising importance of precious materials is also apparent, in that floor mosaics and murals increasingly imitated the appearance of expensive colored marble. Of course, this imitation of marble incrustation and *opus sectile* had also already existed in earlier residential architecture. Yet in the third century this idea began to be much more widely propagated than before, and even reached a new degree of popularity and lavishness in the fourth (Michaelides 1985; Ling 1991, 192; Zimmermann and Ladstätter 2010, 165). The living spaces of the late Empire thus became ever more similar to dream worlds filled with wealth and opulence. In the end, changes in the thematic spectrum of the images also show how important this phenomenon was in representing the *dominus*' status in his own home. This will be our concluding topic.

The Discourse Grows More Complex: A New Thematic Spectrum in the Pictorial World

The growing interest in representative discourse also consistently affected the domestic pictorial world; it is unsurprising that it was primarily the images that influenced perception of the residence as a discursive space. The thematic reorientation in pictorial design of the late third and early fourth centuries appears to be particularly informative in this respect. New themes suddenly became popular, and other themes that had previously dominated in residential spaces receded.

Previously, domestic images had mostly been dominated by happy and relaxed worlds of pleasure, at least until the late third century. This discourse was primarily conveyed through mythical representations: walls and floors featured images of Dionysus and Aphrodite as the two divine representatives of supreme happiness; scenes showing the lively and erotic frolicking of satyrs, maenads, and nymphs, the carefree play of *erotes*, the happy life of enamored Nereids and sea monsters, and countless images of mythical couples, heroes, gods and goddesses with their lovers that thematize the relationship between the sexes were also common. Depictions of food and the gifts of nature—references to the wealth and luxury of the feast—were added to these. All in all, the images in imperial domestic architecture impressively evoked an atmosphere full of cheerful and carefree joy, prosperity, and good living. However, as the third century turned into the fourth, new images of aristocratic status presentation crowded into the interior decoration and contested the former omnipresence of

these mythical figures (Dunbabin 1978, 38–130; Raeck 1992, 24–61; Muth 1998, 270–275, and 2001, 113–114). The new images now showed the aristocrat as the owner of large and rich domains; as a noble *dominus* waited on by his servants, sometimes together with his wife as the beautiful *domina*; as a hunting nobleman with a wealthy entourage; or as the host of public and prestigious games, chariot races, or animal hunts. These images, with their scenes taken from the real world, expressed the central themes of the representational discourse through which the late imperial aristocracy increasingly defined its status.

These new images primarily occupied the important representational spaces and the transitional rooms leading to them. The well-known late fourth-century Dominus Julius mosaic ([Figure 21.6](#)), for example, featured as the central floor decoration in a reception room in a wealthy townhouse in Carthage (Schneider 1983, 68–84; Arce 1997, 21–22; Ben Abed 2006, 40–41). As was appropriate to the room's function, the mosaic served to express claims to superior social status: the center shows an extravagant rural villa belonging to the *dominus*, while various scenes on the sides show the *dominus* and *domina* in their roles as aristocrats and wealthy property owners. As we have already seen, an equally extravagant mosaic tableau decorated the large corridor outside the basilica in the Piazza Armerina villa. It showed the *dominus* as the sponsor of numerous hunting expeditions to the boundaries of the world in search of dangerous and exotic animals that were then transported to Rome for games in the circus.



Figure 21.6 Mosaic of Dominus Julius at Carthage, Tunis, Bardo Museum.

Photo: S. Muth.

The changes in the thematic spectrum have frequently been interpreted as indicators of a fundamental shift in the mentality of the period. The retreat of mythical representations is seen as a central indicator of this (for more details on the following, see Muth 2001). Some interpret this retreat as a result of the growing influence of Christianity. Supposedly, society was less and less interested in the myths of pagan gods and heroes and thus no longer wanted to adorn its houses with them; late antique houses with mythical imagery are correspondingly interpreted as belonging to the pagan aristocracy that was desperately clinging to the relics of the old culture. An alternative explanation is the social reconstitution of the upper class in late antiquity, with new barbarian elites coming to the fore and supplanting the old Roman aristocracy. This new upper class would have regarded these myths as relics of a culture foreign to their own, and thus used them less for articulating their value system in their houses; they would have preferred images of status presentation that they considered better suited to express their own cultural identity and social prestige. Either scenario assumes a

problematization of the mythical images, which then led the upper class increasingly to distance itself from these relics of the old culture. The retreat of mythical images in the house is thus explained by this distancing—and the emergence of new images of status presentation is therefore considered a reaction to the gaps that were now gaping in the domestic pictorial world.

It is worth asking, however, whether the retreat in mythical images is really the key to understanding this period. Another approach seems more plausible, especially since it considers the changes within the broader context of the transformations in domestic culture at that time. Crucially, it focuses less on the decline of the mythical images, and more on the emergence of the new status images. The interest in these new pictorial themes can be easily explained by the reconceptualization of the house as *the* central space of upper-class life in the late imperial period (Ellis 1988, 1991; Scott 1997, 53–54; Muth 1998, 270–282; Borg and Witschel 2001, 113–114). In the late imperial cities, public spaces increasingly lost their significance as a stage for aristocratic representation (Borg and Witschel 2001; Borg 2007). Rituals of representative communication and interaction that had previously taken place on the fora or in the city's public buildings were increasingly moved into the domestic spaces. In the late imperial period, the house therefore became a more complex zone, accommodating and concentrating numerous diverse aspects of life that had previously been distinguished by their different spatial contexts, ranging from public to private. With the increasing number of representative rituals performed within the household, the need arose to relocate the discourse of status presentation—which had previously been negotiated via the pictorial world of the public space—into the domestic sphere.

It was therefore a change in perception of the house as a space of discourse that led to the emergence of new themes in the domestic pictorial world. And in turn, this incorporation of new themes inevitably led to a reduction in the previously dominant mythical images. The decline in mythical imagery is therefore not a consequence of alienation or growing disinterest. This also means that it is not valid to use developments in interior decoration to reconstruct some sort of mentality shift regarding attitudes to pagan mythology. On the contrary, the houses of the fourth and fifth centuries continue to show a vibrant interest in mythical images and use them in the same way as prior interior decoration did: as a blueprint for social roles and moral concepts (Muth 2001).

This is confirmed by the surviving evidence for mythical images. It shows that any claim that the images simply perpetuated meaningless references and were increasingly no longer understood is unfounded. Instead, they are now specifically oriented toward the new interest in status presentation. Mythical images that reference both the relationship between the sexes and aristocratic status, such as representations of heroes with their lovers that also emphasize their role as heroes, warriors, or hunters, now became particularly popular. The discovery of Achilles on Skyros is one of these prominent themes. A late fourth-century mosaic decorating the central representation room in a Spanish villa near Pedrosa de la Vega ([Figure 21.7](#); Lancha 1997, 187–190; Muth, 1998, 436–438; Dunbabin 1999, 153–154) shows him surrounded by Lycomedes' daughters, who crowd around and hug their lover while the hero is ready to storm into battle. Other mosaics depict Meleager and Atalanta, Adonis and Aphrodite,

or Achilles and Briseis. We often also find motifs of status presentation incorporated into the images, resulting in the creation of new iconographies in mythical story telling. A late fourth-century mosaic in a villa near Cardenajimeno ([Figure 21.8](#); Lancha 1997, 170–173; López Monteagudo, Navarro Sáez, and De Palol Salellas 1998, 21–28; Muth 1998, 414–415) does not depict Meleager and Atalanta on the hunt, but rather presents them as a couple surrounded by hunting horse and servant. The new hunting images of the aristocracy of late antiquity commonly present very little actual activity, but emphasize assistants and expensive horses. The mythical protagonists are therefore adapted to the new forms of status presentation—some of the heroes even wear clothing typically worn by aristocrats in late antiquity. Mythical images were thus clearly updated and adapted to the new moral concepts and representational needs of the upper class. Ultimately, however, this revision of mythical imagery is not a new achievement of late antiquity; mythical images have been updated to articulate the value discourses of their societies for as long as they have existed. In its basic structure, therefore, the usage of mythical images within the Roman house remained unchanged and, contrary to a number of hypotheses put forward by various scholars, the late third/early fourth century was not a period of fundamental change in this respect.



Figure 21.7 Achilles mosaic from the villa of Pedrosa de la Vega.

Photo: S. Muth.



Figure 21.8 Meleager and Atalanta mosaic from the villa of Cardeñajimeno.

Photo: S. Muth.

The only real change in the iconography of the late imperial house at the turn of the fourth century appears to have been the addition of a stronger representative discourse, to which the imagery responded with new themes and updates to mythical scenes. What is exciting about this, however, is that the first signs of this change can already be seen earlier, with the result that we cannot really speak of a phenomenon that only begins in late antiquity. Depictions of attending servants, which first appear in early third-century wall paintings, point toward a growing interest in status presentation around this time, as do mosaics showing scenes of hunting expeditions and domain life that likewise date to the early third century (Ling 1991, 194; Mielsch 2001, 173–174; Zimmermann & Ladstätter 2010, 114–119, 168–169; Muth 1998, 273–275; Borg and Witschel 2001, 114; Borg 2007, 67). Strictly speaking, these are the roots of the changes in the thematic spectrum of domestic iconography that are generally thought of as only arising in the late third/early fourth century.

Decoration in the Late Imperial House: Some Perspectives for the Future

The concrete decorative design of the late imperial domestic space is therefore noticeably different from that of the early and high imperial eras. New forms of spatial perception and new decorative effects arose. The relationship between wall and floor decoration was

reevaluated, the decorative system gained new structural options for emphasizing extravagance and prestige, and the iconography's thematic spectrum changed. However, it should be noted that these considerable changes did not occur as late as the turn from the third to the fourth century, the alleged end of an era to which scholars would like to attribute such cultural caesuras. Although many of these changes only become fully apparent in the fourth century, their actual onset has repeatedly been shown to be in the early third century. The trends that were to dominate the interior design of houses therefore seem to have been determined primarily in the early third century, but the consequent developments of these tendencies then continue throughout the fourth and fifth centuries. As far as the suspected transition from antiquity to late antiquity at the turn from the third to the fourth century is concerned, one can say that the surviving archaeological evidence for Roman houses paints a much more complex picture than this simple hypothesis would suggest. A more sophisticated discussion that takes the individual cultural sectors into consideration may provide much-needed answers in this regard.

All the different changes in the interior decoration of houses can be explained by a basic desire for a new perception of the domestic living space. The goal at the time was apparently to challenge the viewer more aggressively with a more suggestive ambiance. Another primary aim was an increase in splendor that affected not only the entire decorative system, but also the thematic spectrum of the images themselves. The changes can only be appreciated in their historical dimension if we look at the individual phenomena in context; this has consequences for future research. The interior decoration of a house must always be considered in the full context of its overall effect, and must thus be examined as a complete ensemble. Significant is not what changes in individual iconographic subjects, but how they are integrated into the overall thematic spectrum; not what changes in geometric mosaic décor, but how it is bound into the decorative system; not what changes in wall decoration, but how it interacts with floor decoration; not individual decorated spaces, but their relationship with the surrounding rooms; not room decoration in itself, but its interaction with the viewer and the rituals that take place in that room; and finally, not the individual static location within a narrow time window, but diachronic change over a longer period. It is only when we adopt these broader perspectives on the evidence that we really begin to understand it. And only then do we have the opportunity to see the real significance of late imperial interior decoration for history in general.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Fundamental and groundbreaking articles establishing this field of research were and are still Thébert (1987), Ellis (1988 and 1991), and Scott (1994); also McKay (1975, 73–85) and

Wilson (1983, esp. 73–85). An overview of the history and state of research is provided in Baldini Lippolis (2001, 19–27) and Uytterhoeven (2007, esp. 25–32, 41–44, 50–64). An ideal introduction to the current state of research as well as questions and perspectives on late imperial household research would be Lavan, Özgenel, and Sarantis (2007), particularly the articles by Uytterhoeven, Baldini Lippolis, Özgenel, Ellis, Ghedini and Bullo, and Rossiter.

A good overview of the discoveries in late imperial *domus* and *villae* is provided in Baldini Lippolis (2001 and 2005); see also the compilations by Brands and Rutgers (1999), Uytterhoeven (2007, 65–99), and Sodini (1995 and 1997). Overviews of individual regions are as follows: Italy: Sfameni (2006); North Africa: Bullo and Ghedini (2003), Carucci (2007), and Ghedini and Bullo (2007); Spain: Gorges (1979), Fernández Castro (1982), and Arce, Chavarría, and Ripoll (2007). For more on Roman imperial-era residential architecture involving late imperial discoveries, see McKay (1975), Ellis (2000), and Gros (2001).

Examples of important discoveries with rich interior decoration that have survived in an acceptable state are the villa at Piazza Armerina (Kähler 1973; Carandini, Ricci, and de Vos 1982; Wilson 1983; Gentili 1999; Muth 2005), the Villa of Maternus in Carranque, Spain (Fernández-Galiano 1994; Muth 1998, 415–419), the Nymphaeum Domus in Nabeul, Tunisia (Darmon 1980; Muth 1998, 376–380; Carucci 2007, 157), and the villa of Chiragan, France (Bergmann 1999 and 2007). These are joined by exciting and promising new discoveries such as the villa of Noheda, Spain (Lledó Sandoval 2010) or the Villa of Cazzanello near Tarquinia, Italy (Aoyagi, Angelelli, and Fujisawa 2003; Aoyagi and Angelelli 2005).

For research on decorative design in distinct room types, Bullo and Ghedini (2003), Carucci (2007), Ghedini and Bullo (2007), and Özgenel (2007) are helpful. For the design of representational and banquet spaces, Ellis (1988, 1991, and 1997), Rossiter (1991), Scott (1997), and Parrish (1995) are particularly important. Perception of room sequences and their decoration while walking through the house is discussed in Scott (1994 and 1997, 60–61), Ellis (1999), and Muth (1999 and 2005).

The various forms of decoration have received varying degrees of attention in scholarship, but floor mosaics are certainly the most extensively researched. The standard works on mosaic art in general with reference to late imperial discoveries are Ling (1998) and especially Dunbabin (1999). Lancha (1997) discusses imperial-era mosaics of the first to the fourth centuries CE. Furthermore, Dunbabin (1978) is especially fundamental for mosaics in North Africa; Guardia Pons (1992) and Morand (1994) provide an overview of late imperial mosaics in Spain. Good and sometimes excellent illustrations of North African mosaics can be found in Blancard-Lemée et al. (1995) and Ben Abed (2006). Moreover, Dunbabin (1978) offers the most comprehensive discussion of the various iconic mosaic themes. Important works on individual iconic themes are: on domain and status representation images: Schneider (1983), Raeck (1992), also Ellis (1991, 124–125), Scott (1997), Arce (1997), and Rossiter (2007, 379–381); on mythical images: Ellis (1991, 125–127), Muth (1998 and 2001); cf. also Raeck (1992), Morand (1994), Parrish (1995), and Scott (1997).

Good initial overviews of late imperial wall paintings can be found in Ling (1991, 186–197) and Mielsch (2001, 107–138, 158–160, 168–174). Important evidence has come from the

houses in Ephesus, which has now been republished in Zimmermann and Ladstätter (2010, 164–172). The villa of Chiragan is an important discovery for our understanding of statuary: see especially Bergmann (1999 and 2007); for more on statuary in the late imperial household, see Ellis (1991, 127–129), Stirling (2005 and 2007), and Muth (2007).

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CHAPTER 22

Roman Art and Death The Decoration of Roman Tombs

Francisca Feraudi-Gruénais

Anything but Merely Sepulchral

The decoration of Roman tombs—that is, for our purposes, the permanent decoration of chamber tombs in metropolitan Rome with wall paintings, mosaic pavements, and stucco reliefs ([Figures 22.1](#), [22.6](#), [22.11](#))—is an important part of tomb décor, along with movable tomb furnishings, especially relief-decorated urns, altars, sarcophagi, and statues. What makes studying tomb decoration so exciting is its thematic and material heterogeneity and complexity.



Figure 22.1 Rome, Via Appia, Mausoleum X, rich stucco decoration in its descending corridor.

After: G. Mancini, *Notizie degli Scavi* (Rome, 1923), pl. 13.2.

Although this decoration took effect in *tombs*, it would be misguided to reduce its messages to exclusively sepulchral content purely because of its location: should, for example, the themes of the painted décor in Tomb C of the Via Portuensis—peacocks, plants, adults at play—really be interpreted as sepulchral symbols simply because they decorate a tomb? In searching for an answer, it is helpful to approach the problem by analyzing the paintings’ contexts. I do not intend to deny categorically possible transcendence-related evidence within the visual repertoire, but rather suggest to examine first the general characteristics and internal dynamics of tomb decoration to avoid premature conclusions. In particular, the following three errors should be avoided: interpreting decorative elements of tombs in isolation or exclusively within sepulchral contexts; overgeneralizing the results of sarcophagus studies, which are supposedly representative due to the large quantity of surviving material; and underestimating the fact that the sepulchral sphere is, ultimately, also a part of life, created by the living for the living, and by people whose worldviews worked without clearly defined conceptions of an afterlife (Pekáry 1994; Criniti 1996; Bodel 2004; Michaels 2006; Rüpke and Scheid 2010). The fact that death-related aspects were thematized and depicted in tombs does not inherently and conclusively prove that *all* decorative elements belonged to a system of sepulchral symbolism.

These characteristics constitute a fundamental difference between the permanent decoration under discussion here and the most prominent forms of movable tomb decoration, which are, from a purely functional perspective, much more closely linked with the funerary events. Accordingly, very different realms of thought could be expressed in a tomb, on the one hand by potentially (more) “sepulchral” or “afterlife-related” movable items due to their close functional link to the actual burial, and on the other hand by immovable decoration, which is potentially (more) closely related to the world of the living. In this respect, the relationship that the objects communicating these two concepts had to one another and the effects that they produced are particularly interesting.

Multiple Facets

Just one facet among many within the tomb décor of the Roman Empire is the immovable funerary decoration that was developed in the city of Rome. In the Italian regions beyond the *urbs*, we encounter a repertoire of tomb architecture and décor that follows entirely different typologies and forms, and, if we include the various local manifestations of funerary culture in the Roman provinces, this diversity increases even more. However, our knowledge of tomb decoration in metropolitan Rome helps us to understand tomb decoration in the peripheral regions of the Roman Empire. Regardless of the vexed question concerning the so-called Romanization and its mechanisms and extent, it is undisputed that themes and iconographies that had been developed in the *urbs* also took effect in areas far removed and culturally different from Rome, where they interacted with indigenous formal traditions, and fused into distinctive local forms of tomb decoration (e.g., Rostovtzeff 1913/1914/2003; Blanc 1998).

The time frame chosen here likewise has many facets, as it comprises the interval from the start of the Principate to the beginning of the fourth century CE. During this period, architectural types and decorative forms were developed in Rome that significantly shaped the character of tomb decoration. In various ways, tomb decoration of this period differed typologically and

conceptually from the tomb décor of the late Republican era, as well as from that of the catacombs, which emerged from the late second century CE onwards. And yet, the tomb decoration under discussion here takes on an important intermediary role given that it is just as inconceivable without its (im)mediate Roman Republican, Greek Hellenistic, or Italo-Etruscan predecessors (Moltesen and Weber-Lehmann 1992; Gilotta 2000; Mielsch 2001) as the catacomb paintings (Zimmermann, [Chapter 23](#), this volume) are inconceivable without the prior imperial-period tomb decoration.

We have already noted the multifaceted nature of tomb decoration that surrounded and potentially interacted with the movable décor. Most important are the decoratively sculpted urns, funerary altars, and sarcophagi, as well as statues and portraits in the round, although the latter are unfortunately very rarely preserved in their original contexts. In addition, the non-figurative repertoire includes a large amount of inscriptions, which must also be taken into account by any study of tomb decoration. Finally, there are the immaterial components of tomb décor—namely, funerary rituals and recurring commemorative ceremonies—for which the tomb decorations set the scene; they too contributed to the overall effect of tomb chambers. Being aware of this multifaceted nature of tomb decoration therefore prevents one from drawing premature and ultimately wrong conclusions based on isolated evidence, and encourages investigations into the dynamics of how specific types of tomb decoration interacted within the complex frameworks into which they were integrated.

Long Underestimated: Impacts of the History of Scholarship

The effort to establish a comprehensive interpretation of tomb decoration is a recent phenomenon in archaeological research. Unlike the sarcophagi from metropolitan Rome, which began to be systematically published in corpus volumes from 1897 onwards, paintings, mosaics, and stuccos from tombs not only started to be studied later, their research was limited to documenting isolated discoveries and conducting disparate small-scale research for a long time. Even so, in the wake of the systematic study of sarcophagi, other components of tomb furnishings also began to be the subject of systematic investigation: funerary altars (Altmann 1905; Boschung 1987) and marble urns (Sinn 1987), grave reliefs (Zanker 1975; Frenz 1977; Zimmer 1982), funerary portraits (Zanker 1975; Kleiner 1977; Kockel 1993), monumental *klinai* (dining couches; Wrede 1977 and 1981), and finally the tombs themselves (Kockel 1983; Eisner 1986; von Hesberg 1992).

However, it remained not without consequences that questions relating to the significance of the wide range of decorative features were occasionally strongly influenced by the results of sarcophagus studies (most notably Sichtermann 1982; Zanker and Ewald 2004; Junker 2006), which were adapted for tomb decoration in general without considering whether they were actually applicable to this complex phenomenon. Only sporadically if at all did scholars take the necessary step to look beyond the limits of the individual artistic media to assess their interactions and illuminate imperial-period tomb decoration holistically, with due

consideration of the various, usually media-specific capacities for the communication of messages. The monographs by Andreea (1963) and Wrede (1981) were promising recursive efforts at a synoptic view of overarching phenomena. However, while the title of the symposium organized by the Sarkophag-Corpus, “Tomb Art of the Roman Imperial Era” (Koch 1993), raised hopes that interest would go beyond the genre of the sarcophagus, and that the complexity of tomb art would be considered, these hopes were still disappointed. Although here funerary art was granted the significance of being an “important source for the social values, mindsets, and lifestyles of broad strata of the citizenry of the Roman Empire,” immovable tomb décor remained unmentioned alongside extensive discussions of almost all movable genres of the funerary inventory; just about all of the contributions were concerned with problems specific to sarcophagi.

Not coincidentally, more recent monographs have also explicitly avoided a consistent holistic approach on the grounds that such an undertaking would not be possible without first addressing the remaining monumental art forms found in sepulchral contexts (Boschung 1987, 12; Koortbojian 1995, 13–15, 170–171). This was progress, since the monumental forms of immovable decoration were indeed all far from being well researched, and the desideratum was now at least being explicitly acknowledged. Nonetheless, what was still missing was a systematic study of immovable tomb decoration, as well as an approach that could actually do justice to its idiosyncrasies.

It is undisputed that the deplorable state of preservation, particularly of the paintings, which make up the largest part of the (preserved) immovable tomb décor, was a decisive factor in their being neglected by scholars for far too long. In addition, the respectable range of preserved and documented evidence (and, as a result, the potential of such an undertaking) was underestimated.

The first rays of light penetrated the shadowy existence of metropolitan Roman tomb decorations in the course of the large-scale excavation of the Vatican Necropolis (Mielsch, von Hesberg, and Gärtner 1986; Mielsch and von Hesberg 1995). Nevertheless, roughly a decade and a half had to pass before the first systematic and contextual appraisal of the other tomb decorations found in Rome took their internal dynamics into account (Feraudi-Gruénais 2001). Meanwhile, the previous, isolationist view of tomb furnishings seems to have undergone a welcome change. In its contextual complexity, tomb decoration has now become a thriving and inspiring object of historical and archaeological research (e.g., Herdejürgen 2000; Heinzelmann 2001; Zanker and Ewald 2004; Junker 2006; Borg 2013).

The Hidden Locations of Immovable Tomb Decoration

Tomb decoration lived by and with the paradox of having been basically designed to be seen (unlike the catacombs later on, for example, tombs were visible above ground), but having in fact only been visible to and perceivable by a limited group of people. Given that the decoration was physically applied to the tomb structures, it is obvious that these were of crucial significance for the interior décor. As structures situated both above and below ground,

their interiors provided various, but nonetheless characteristic and classifiable, possibilities for applying decoration, which depended on the varying dimensions of the tombs and the types of burials within them; taking this variability into account is crucial for understanding the function and effect of tomb decoration.

Three building types are the most common (Feraudi-Gruénais 2001, 149–155). The columbaria were up to 7 meters high, large structures that provided for hundreds of burials. Their interiors were reminiscent of dovecotes, as their walls were dotted with regular rows of niches containing cinerary urns. They were most popular during the early Principate. This efficient use of wall space left mainly the strips of wall between the rows of niches for decoration ([Figure 22.2](#)), but occasionally the back walls of the niches, and more frequently the niche covers, floors, ceilings, and vaults, were also decorated. By contrast, the burial chambers that were cut into the tuff bedrock (tuff chamber tombs) from the late first to the mid-third centuries CE, with their brick façades attached, were designed to be much smaller ([Figure 22.3](#); von Hesberg 1987). The general shift in funerary practice in the second century CE away from the exclusive use of cremation toward a mix of cremations and inhumations, and finally to inhumation burials only, was reflected in their interior architecture. The urn niches were arranged in the upper parts of the walls (although less systematically than in the columbaria), while *arcosolia* (wider arched niches; [Figure 22.4](#)) were installed in the lower walls and burial shafts (*fossae*) in the floors for inhumations. Apart from the floors and vaults, tomb decoration was mainly applied to the wall sections between the urn and the arcosolium niches, as well as to the lunettes and intrados of the arcosolia. Around the same time, brick chamber tombs lined the roads, dominating their appearance with their more lavishly decorated yet largely standardized façades. Inside, they were essentially designed in the same way as the tuff chamber tombs, especially as regards their size, spatial organization, and layout of the surfaces available for decoration. Apart from these, there were other tomb forms in much smaller numbers, some of which show significant evidence of decoration. Most worth mentioning are the large brick tombs, which are typologically inconsistent, spacious, multistory structures resembling temples or houses that were primarily a phenomenon of the mid-second to early third centuries. These monuments will probably have been extravagantly furnished, especially with movable items, such as statues. The little surviving evidence testifies to relatively elaborate mosaic and stucco décor as well as marble incrustation.

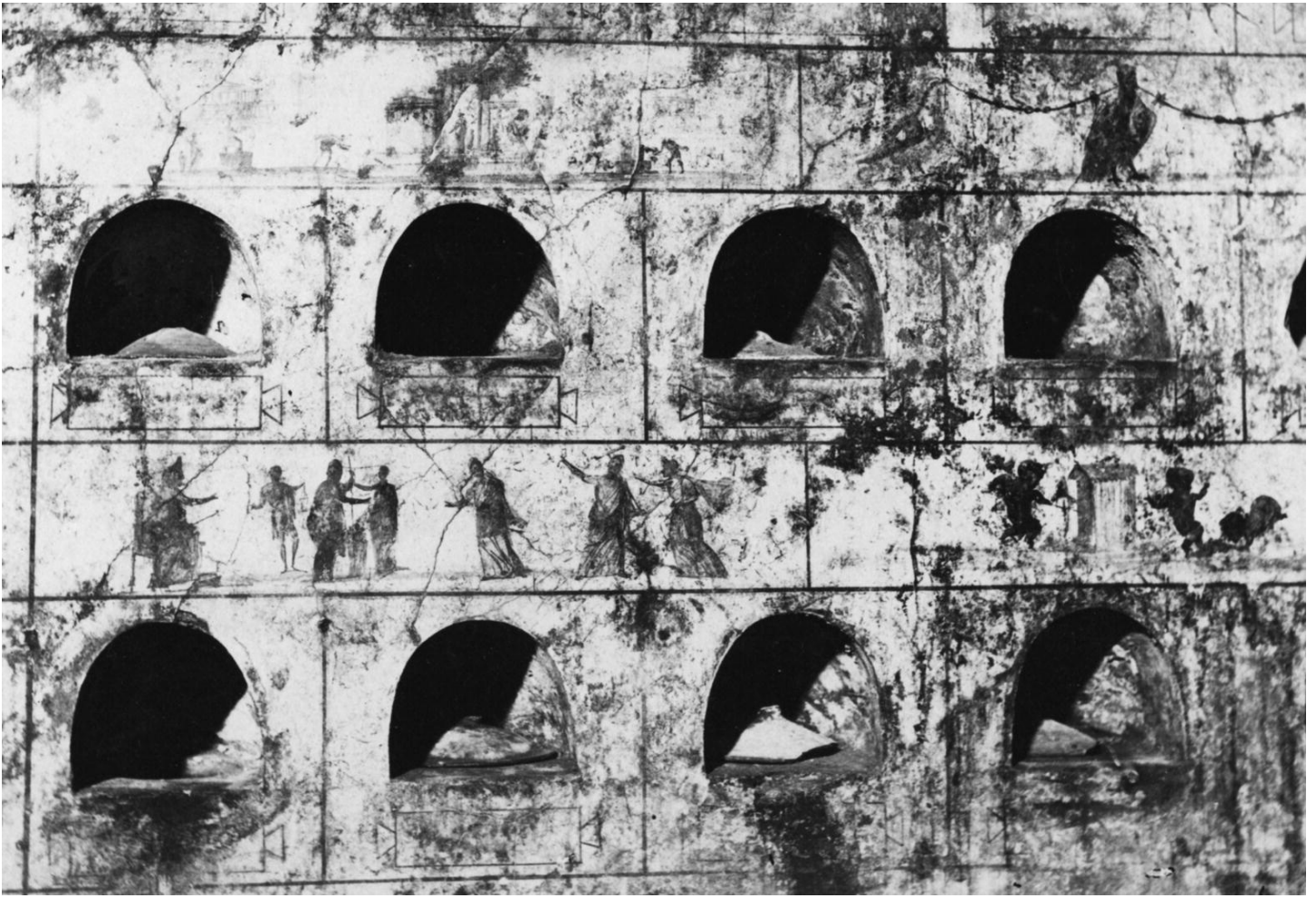


Figure 22.2 Rome, Via Aurelia, Columbarium Doria Pamphili, colorful and expressive paintings on the strips between the rows of niches.

Photo: Phaedra – University of Vienna.



Figure 22.3 Isola Sacra, standardized facades of brick chamber tombs.

Photo: © Gregor Borg.



Figure 22.4 Isola Sacra Tomb 16, interior with niches for ollae, arcosolia, and fossae in the floor.

Photo: © Gregor Borg.

The genres of immovable tomb decoration largely correspond to the prevalent spectrum of options in the non-sepulchral sphere: the most widespread and qualitatively most diverse is painting. Stucco decoration ranks second and also occurs in varying levels of quality and compositional complexity ([Figure 22.1](#)). Mosaic décor naturally occurs mainly on floors, less frequently on selected wall panels, in niches, or on vaults, and, like stucco decoration, expresses a desire for more extravagant décor.

Inside and outside as correlating variables

The exterior of a tomb usually already provides an initial indication of the degree of quality and investment to be found inside. For example, the interior decoration of the large brick tombs predominantly consists of stucco reliefs and marble incrustation, the most lavish and expensive forms of interior décor. Much greater variety in the selection of decorative forms and quality of implementation can be found in the brick and tuff chamber tombs. In most cases the basic principle that the lavishness of the interior correlates with the general standard of the architecture also applies here. It is interesting to note that some of these tombs seem to have been decorated with a strong preference for stucco: one prominent example is Mausoleum H of the Vatican Necropolis, the tomb decoration of which obviously reflects the sculptural

decorative concepts of the so-called temple tombs (Feraudi-Gruénais 2001, 51–53; Gee 2003, 132–173). Mausoleum B of the same necropolis is another prime example of expenditure and quality, this time due to its wall paintings (Feraudi-Gruénais 2001, 46–48). Along with the paintings from the tomb of the Nasonii (Messineo 2000; Feraudi-Gruénais 2001, 66–73), an architecturally more extravagant tuff chamber tomb ([Figures 22.5–22.6](#)), it is among the most outstanding examples of tomb painting in metropolitan Rome. By contrast, chamber tombs that are clearly less conspicuous, almost dollhouse-like, and yet conceived with a view to completeness in detail can be found in the Sepolcreto Ostiense ([Figure 22.7](#)), and, in greater numbers and with very impressive décor, in the sections of the Vatican Necropolis that line the Via Triumphalis (Buranelli, Liverani, and Spinola 2005/2006; Liverani and Spinola 2006; Liverani, Spinola, and Zander 2010). In accordance with their unpretentious architecture, the expenditure and quality of the interior are generally rather modest, and stucco reliefs are less common here. The majority of the wall decoration in these tombs consists of more or less carefully executed paintings.

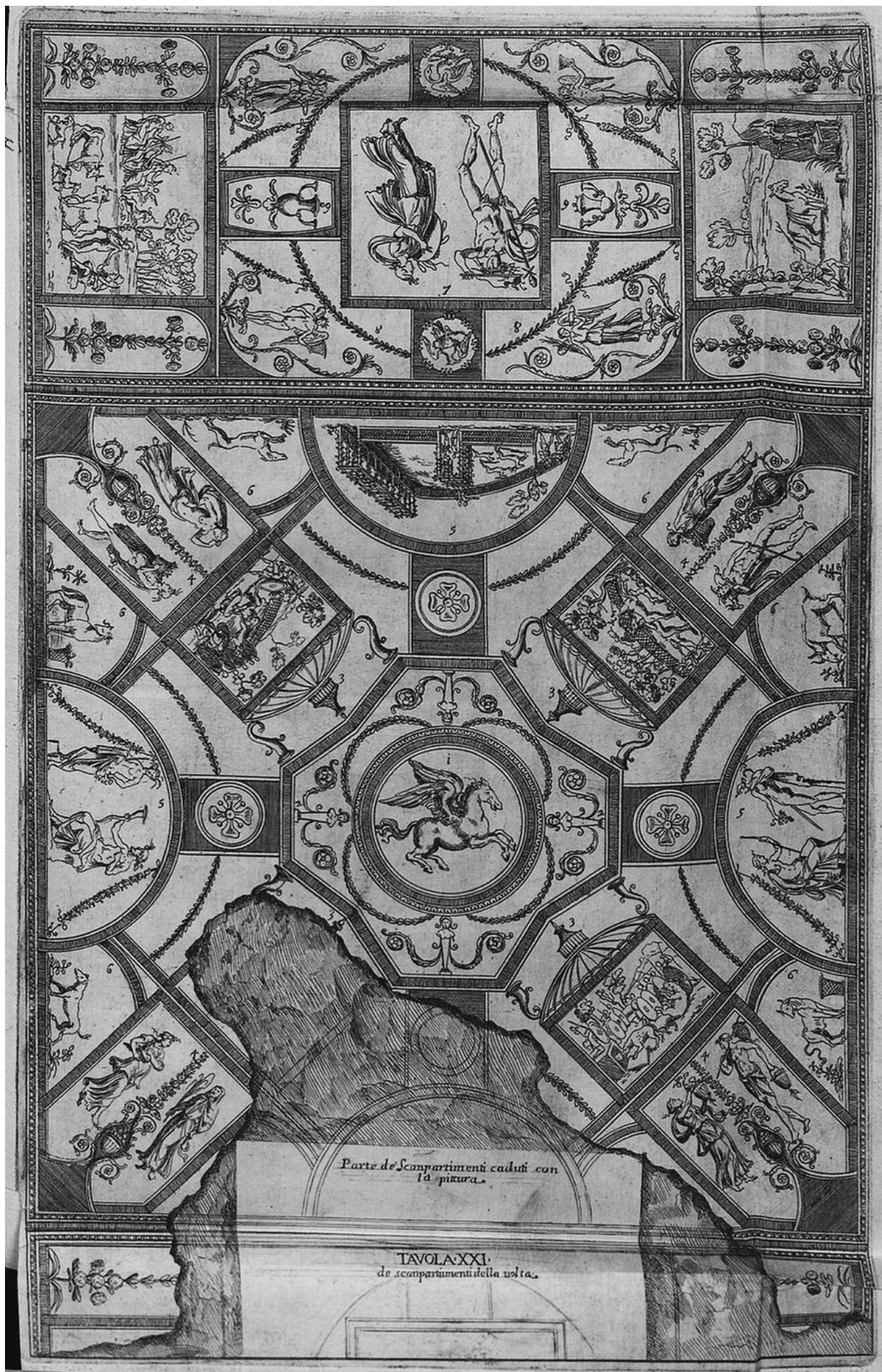


Figure 22.5 Rome, Via Flaminia, Tomb of the Nasonii, outstanding examples of tomb painting within a spacious tuff chamber tomb.

After: G.P. Bellori & P. Santi Bartoli, *Le Pittvre Antiche Del Sepolcro De Nasonii Nella Via Flaminia* (Rome, 1680), pl. 21.



Figure 22.6 Rome, Via Flaminia, Tomb of the Nasonii, panel depicting the rape of Persephone.

After: G.P. Bellori & P. Santi Bartoli, *Le Pittvre Antiche Del Sepolcro De Nasonii Nella Via Flaminia* (Rome, 1680), pl. 12.



Figure 22.7 Rome, Via Ostiensis, Sepolcreto Ostiense.

Photo: Barbara E. Borg.

Chronology, Themes, Trends, and Preferences

Chronology

There is evidence of tombs with non-movable décor throughout the time period under consideration here. From the mid-third century onwards, however, we increasingly find paintings of several decorative phases side by side within a single tomb chamber, which were uncoordinated in terms of content or composition. At the same time, the tomb chambers became increasingly crowded with movable items, especially sarcophagi, to the point of becoming impossible to access. This development marks the beginning of the end of imperial-period “pagan” decoration of chamber tombs and, in fact, of the chamber tomb altogether, as well as the transition to the decorative forms typical of the metropolitan Roman catacombs. The latter

had already started to develop while the chamber tombs were still very popular, but further developed their decoration in new historico-cultural contexts. The second century CE, particularly its second half, saw the qualitative and quantitative apex of tomb decoration. For a period of almost 200 years, the imperial era saw an ever-increasing number of newly erected and especially of newly decorated tombs, followed by a period of marked stagnation after the end of the second century, and finally a waning after the first half of the third century. These decades of decline thus mark the irreversible end of a specific phenomenon of funerary culture that had been initiated and developed by the members of a social class that consisted primarily of freedmen and their descendants. It was this class that was now disappearing—and with it, its forms of self-representation (Feraudi-Gruénais 2001, 164–166).

Themes

The decorative repertoire of these tombs essentially consists of the four thematic areas of mythical narratives; allegorical figures and mythical characters that do not form part of a narrative; depictions of humans (non-mythical people); and a heterogeneous group of “various depictions,” primarily of animals, pygmies, and grotesques, vegetal motifs and objects, still lifes, and scattered patterns.

The most widespread and consistently attested range of themes is that of mythical characters and, of course, the variable group of “various depictions.” Images of humans are relatively uncommon; in fact, realistic images of humans engaged in mundane activities, functions, and situations almost never occur, but humans are frequently found linked to mythical elements. The rather sparse evidence is spread out over the second and early third centuries, the period of greatest prosperity for chamber tombs and their decoration in metropolitan Rome. The mythical narratives show a more differentiated picture. The earliest evidence dates to the last quarter of the first century BCE. After an interruption in the first half of the first century CE, which may only be due to the random nature of our finds, they then continued to be prevalent in the repertoire of tomb decoration from the second half of the first until the early third century. It should be emphasized that only a small portion of tomb chambers contained mythical narratives: only in the second half of the second century did about 50 percent of the preserved tombs with immovable décor contain mythical narratives; in the periods before and after, the portion is reduced to 10 percent (Feraudi-Gruénais 2001, 167). On average, each of the tombs furnished with mythical narratives was decorated with at least three such depictions, which begs the question of whether the resulting thematic combinations were part of a specific underlying program.

Trends and preferences

The noticeable general prosperity of tomb furnishing in the second century was not without consequence for the preference for and distribution of specific thematic groups. The very rare depictions of humans all date to precisely the period in which the likelihood that such depictions would appear was at its highest, due to the large number of tombs in general. Mythical narratives also peaked during this period, even though they were quantitatively subordinate in general. All the more remarkable is the fact that this thematic group occurs in

tomb decoration from the beginning; that is, by the early first century BCE, and thus almost a century and a half before mythical narratives gained significance in the other genres of funerary art, and especially on sarcophagi and marble urns.

Tomb Decoration in Metropolitan Rome

The choice of tomb décor is an indicator of the patron's attitude toward that inevitable aspect of life that is death. What do the chosen subjects reveal about the appreciation of certain themes and images in the sepulchral sphere in comparison with non-sepulchral contexts? To what extent was Roman tomb decoration characterized by specifically “sepulchral” themes? What, in this respect, characterizes immovable tomb decoration by comparison with movable decoration, especially that of sarcophagi? For an essential evaluation of the phenomenon of tomb decoration on the one hand and a “heuristic emancipation” from interpretations of funerary art that used to be dominated by sarcophagus studies on the other, such an analysis of preferences is indispensable.

Considering the small percentage of preserved tombs with mythical narratives, their very varied and extensive repertoire is particularly noteworthy (less than 20 percent; Feraudi-Gruénais 2001, 170–186). In order to assess whether these scenes are sepulchral symbols, we need to consider their respective presence (or absence) in funerary and non-funerary contexts. The following list is therefore grouped by frequency of attested narrative scenes; themes that predominantly occur in sepulchral contexts are marked in bold. Incidentally, what they have in common is that they usually also occur within the repertoire of metropolitan Roman sarcophagi; five of them (the death of Alcestis, Alcestis and Hercules, Alcestis as a guide for a dead man, Ocnus and his donkey, the return of Eurydice) have no parallels at all in non-sepulchral genres and contexts. They therefore appear to be “sepulchral themes” par excellence.

- Attested only once: Achilles with Chiron // Admetus before Pelias // Adonis and Venus // **Death of Alcestis** // **Alcestis as a Guide for a Dead Man** // Antigone before Creon (?) // Bellerophon and Pegasus // Diomedes with Palladium // Death of Dirce // Abduction of Europa // **Return of Eurydice to Orpheus** // Hercules and Antaeus // Hercules and the Centaur // Hero and Leander // Hylas and the Nymphs (?) // Lycurgus in the Grapevine // Killing of the Niobids // Odysseus (at the Theft of the Palladium by Diomedes) // Oedipus before the Sphinx // Pegasus and Nymphs Adorning Him // Philoctetes Wounded // Priam before Achilles // **Prometheus at the Creation of Man** // Liberation of Prometheus by Hercules
- Attested twice: **Danaids** // Bacchus and Ariadne // Hercules and Cerberus // **Ocnus and His Donkey** // Judgment of Paris
- Attested three times: Mars and Rhea Silvia
- Attested five times: **Alcestis and Hercules**
- Attested six times: **Abduction of Proserpina**

In contrast, a considerable number of themes appear either exclusively or at least predominantly in non-sepulchral contexts: Achilles with Chiron, Diomedes with the Palladium, Death of Dirce, Abduction of Europa, Hercules and Antaeus, Hero and Leander, Lycurgus in the Grapevine, Pegasus and Nymphs Adorning Him, Philoctetes Wounded, and Priam before Achilles. This demonstrates to what extent the decoration of tombs in the city of Rome drew on a thematic repertoire that was just as well established outside the sepulchral sphere, and how inaccurate it would be to present that sphere as an isolated, purely “eschatological” space.

The third and largest group includes all those themes for which no preference for the sepulchral or non-sepulchral spheres can be determined, be it because (due to the random nature of our knowledge?) there are hardly any parallels (*), or because we have similar amounts of evidence in both sepulchral and non-sepulchral contexts: Admetus before Pelias(*), Adonis and Venus(*), Antigone before Creon(*), Bacchus and Ariadne, Bellerophon and Pegasus, Hercules and the Centaur(*), Hercules and Cerberus, Hylas and the Nymphs(*), Mars and Rhea Silvia, Killing of Niobe, Odysseus at the Theft of the Palladium(*), Oedipus before the Sphinx, Judgment of Paris, and Liberation of Prometheus(*).

Taking into account the respective incidence of themes in sepulchral or non-sepulchral spaces, it thus seems that the selection of themes for tomb decoration was balanced overall, with only a small number of themes preferring one sphere over the other. However, it is all the more interesting that mythical narratives with sepulchral preference appear up to six times in a single tomb, a fact that indicates that the selection of certain themes and their combination could lead to a “sepulchral predominance” in funerary contexts (e.g., Tomb of the Nasonii or Mausoleum I of the Vatican Necropolis; Feraudi-Gruénais 2001, 66–73, 53–56; see also 199–200). Accordingly, it is not surprising that the pivotal themes of this “sepulchral shift” were the two most frequently attested and thus sepulchral themes par excellence: Hercules and Alcestis and the Abduction of Proserpina (Feraudi-Gruénais 2001, 184–186).

Tomb decorations from the groups of “allegories” and “mythical characters without narrative context” are found either in isolation or together with other (mythical) figures, but always without any identifiable narrative context (Feraudi-Gruénais 2001, 186–189). The most common representatives of this repertoire are the Dioscuri, Lucifer and Vesper, Cupids and Psyche, as well as Dionysiac figures such as Bacchantes, Satyrs, and Sileni; furthermore, mythical animals also occur; that is, creatures that are alien to the natural world of animals or appear in unnatural arrangements such as Eagles on Globes, Capricorns, Griffins, Sea Monsters, Ascending Pegasoi, and Sphinxes. Allegorical figures include Fortuna, Genii, Graces, Horae, Hypnos, Victories, and the Seasons.

The concepts and semantics of these subjects are all drawn from “outside” the real world and appear to be well suited to visualizing idealizing, trans-real desires and dreams. Motifs that foster abstract connotations of a cheerful existence (Dionysiac and Apollonian representations, Cupids, and Graces) appear alongside those that evoke an equally abstract atmosphere of elevation and victory, often primarily by using symbols of power and domination borrowed from the art employed by the state. These themes do not necessarily refer to death and an afterlife, but it can also not be excluded that the cheerful supra-real atmosphere that they

evoked may have been an expression of vague hopes for the beyond. More tangible references to an afterlife may be identified in images of encounters with deities (Selene, Mercury as escort of souls). Finally, the desire for protection of the tomb may also have played a part, which was expressed via images of apotropaic beings such as Griffins and Sphinxes, for example.

The various, ultimately not very concrete or concise aspects hinted at by the images of mythical and allegorical figures in tomb decoration suggest notions that seem to originate at best in hazy hopes (for the afterlife?). The selection of subjects shows that, by means of vague, tentatively positive compositions, image decoration was ultimately much more a matter of creating a pleasant ambience that evoked a supra-natural atmosphere in which not only the deceased could feel “at home” and linger in memory beyond death, but also those who were left behind in the living world. Even allusions that reference an afterlife thus ultimately remained anchored in the world of the living.

Depictions of humans are particularly interesting when they visualize subjects that derive (at least formally) from real-life situations, as they immediately beg questions about an intended relationship between image and reality (Feraudi-Gruénais 2001, 189–194). Occasionally such direct references to reality may indeed have been intended, although apparently realistic images are also often interspersed by trans-real features. Only in very few cases do we find references to reality with actual retrospective content. Without exception, all depictions of this category are more or less thoroughly riddled with evocations of fantastic environments.

Portraits, for instance, often feature in *clipei* ([Figure 22.8](#)) or in ceiling decorations in places that would usually have shown depictions of gods and seasons. This specific presentation lends these largely reality-based representations new qualities that transcend reality: even though they refer to the past, they are, at the same time, elevated above the mundane. Portrait heads in *clipei* are otherwise quite frequently found on sarcophagi ([Figure 15.5](#)), marble urns, and funerary altars. However, here the individuals depicted are also elevated beyond reality onto a supra-real sphere, for instance by associating them with virtuous or aphrodisiac connotations through wreaths of honor or the shell of Venus. This was probably due less to expectations of apotheosis, but rather to a desire to symbolize the virtue of the deceased and the qualities that elevated him or her beyond a mere transitory human existence. A few small-scale representations of humans, whose faces cannot in fact be verified as portraits but whose proximity to specific burial niches indicates that they may have referenced real individuals, appear to have been both more closely based on reality and more strongly related to the past. Among these is an accounting scene and one of a body being ceremoniously laid out, but it is not always clear whether identification with specific individuals was intended. By contrast, images of children or adults at play appear to be images of real-life situations only at first glance. While they could have evoked an atmosphere of ostensible (child-like) freedom and unconcern, the addition of divine figures again results in an unreal sublimation of the scenes. Moreover, landscapes that seem to portray neither reality nor myth, despite their essential connection to reality, likewise appear suited to evoke an atmosphere of peaceful idylls that did not *have* to be associated with concepts of “paradise” or (particularly in seascapes) the Isles of Bliss, but certainly *could* be: we are dealing with universally desirable states of being that

are similarly reflected in funerary epigrams. Depictions of farm labor, framed by hovering and festooned Cupids that again serve to detach the scenes from reality, are linked to ideas of peaceful idyll in a similar way (Feraudi-Gruénais 2001, 191–194; Michaels 2006). The content signified by images showing men pressing wine also goes beyond the actual objects of representation, especially given that the intention can hardly have been to suggest that this was the tomb owner's actual profession. Images of Sileni pressing grapes will surely have been an important influence here, as they are found on numerous sarcophagus reliefs but also in tomb decoration. Men and Sileni are interchangeable here; the images clearly do not serve to identify specific persons and the circumstances of their lives, but rather to create a pleasant, Bacchic ambience linked to *otium*. Aspects of *virtus* were probably attached to images borrowing from military iconography; there are numerous parallels on sarcophagi and their models, the so-called historical reliefs. It seems improbable that hunting scenes (as well as the mythical hunts shown on some sarcophagi) emphasized aspects of virtue; it is more likely that representations of such pleasurable hunting expeditions were once more meant to evoke a relaxed atmosphere.



Figure 22.8 Rome, Via Portuensis, Tomb C, portrait head in a clipeus. Photo: By permission of Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali – Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma.

© Photo: Francisca Feraudi-Gruénais.

The borderlines between idealizations of reality and fanciful prospection into an afterlife prove on the whole to be very blurry. All of these images, be they portraits that lift their patrons out of the confines of reality or depictions of idyllic landscapes, point beyond the sphere of real life that they supposedly represent. Nevertheless, it seems that even in these representations, the real world (albeit usually in an idealized and ambiguous form) was more present than an afterlife.

The group of “various depictions” comprises, besides a broad spectrum of decorative motifs or motif groups taken from the natural world of animals and plants, a varied inventory of motifs ranging from objects of various kinds to the grotesque and the fantastic (Feraudi-Gruénais 2001, 194–199). The code-like curtness of their designs allowed them to be universally employed, which is why they are also the most common decorative element in the repertoire of metropolitan Roman tomb chambers. Even modestly decorated tombs were at least adorned with simple painted elements taken from this repertoire—one that was also widespread in non-funerary contexts (villas, houses, public spaces, and so on). Special attention should thus be paid to those animals, fruits, and objects that are more commonly found in the sepulchral sphere and may consequently be assumed to have signified something specific to this context. The frequently occurring peacock, for example, whose beauty and presence in Elysium are also continually extolled in poetry of the early imperial era, may also have evoked idealizing and transcendent connotations, besides its obvious decorative function. The popularity of eagles and globes, by contrast, may have been based on their implicit symbolism of apotheosis, even though the semantic content is vague here. Groups of fighting animals, on the other hand, may have simultaneously alluded to the inevitability of death and to bucolic country life. Some levels of the symbolism present in the vegetal décor can be grasped from passages in poetry and literary consolations of the imperial age, where they are typically separated from specific mythical contexts and represent symbols of Elysium (e.g., Statius, *Silvae*. 5.1.257: “garlands and Elysian flowers”). In addition, poppy seed capsules, an attribute of Hypnos that often appears in sepulchral contexts, are more overt symbols of death; the same applies to pomegranates and pine cones, which are repeatedly found as decorative elements in tomb chambers as well as on freestanding grave monuments.

As elsewhere, Bacchic elements frequently mix with idyllic and consoling ones. Depictions of objects from grave cult and decoration, on the other hand, portray objects used in the actual grave cult and elements of funerary décor: plant and climbing vine motifs, flowers, and so on. The choice may have been primarily motivated by a desire to participate, at least in a two-dimensional format and in the imagination, in the idylls of *cepotaphia* (tomb gardens), which enclosed some lavish tombs. Once again, some of their motifs have Bacchic connotations, such as vines, ivy, grapes, pomegranates, and pine cones. Closely connected to them are the numerous representations of birds flanking fruit baskets in all genres of sepulchral art. Birds ([Figure 22.9](#)) may have seemed particularly suitable as visual symbols with sepulchral content because they were the natural inhabitants of *cepotaphia*. Among flowers, roses were particularly popular, because they perpetually visualized the annual festival of the *Rosalia* (Bodel 2004). Objects that were used during the real *funus*, such as flambeaus and candelabra, were also depicted in wall decorations of tombs. Like the painted wreaths and garlands that served to imitate the real adornments of the tombs, large painted vessels functioned as substitutes for the amply attested splendid objects of this kind that furnished tombs and villas, to say nothing of *oscilla* and hanging masks, whose Bacchic connotations were brought to bear through their interplay with other objects from this context, such as the syrinx, *pedum*, or thyrsus. We also encounter explicitly apotropaic depictions of gorgon heads, which are also frequently found on movable tomb décor.



Figure 22.9 Rome, Via Appia, Mausoleum Y, representation of birds in a sepulchral context.

After: G. Mancini, *Notizie degli Scavi* 1923, pl. 15.1.

Due to the mix-and-match approach that they encouraged, the heterogeneous themes grouped under “various depictions” were ideally suited for use as a universal decorative repertoire and were thus by no means limited to tombs. Their semantic content remained vague and their main function was always to evoke tranquil and cheerful connotations. Explicit concepts of an afterlife are lacking; the focus was always on evoking hazy associations of happiness, which might at most have indirectly encouraged hopes for a pleasant life after death.

Purely Sepulchral Symbols?

Most of the subjects selected for tomb decoration originate outside the tomb; there is, thus, no preference for themes primarily conceived for sepulchral contexts. A considerable proportion of tomb decoration visualizes qualities and ideas that also came to bear in the world of the living—in houses, in villas, and on objects of everyday life.

Trans-real connotations that could possibly be read as referring to an afterlife, or as symbols with purely sepulchral content, can only be identified in very isolated cases (e.g., Abduction of Proserpina, Alcestis, or poppy capsules). Decorative elements that imitate actual tomb

ornamentation, such as garlands and wreaths, or material components of the grave cult, such as roses, refer less to a world beyond than to the reality (or better, an imagined reality) of the funeral and the tomb.

Only the mythical narratives differ insofar as “sepulchral” themes dominate the repertoire in some individual tombs, although themes used predominantly in funerary contexts were outnumbered overall when compared with themes used predominantly in non-funerary contexts. This observation is interesting and, at the same time, deserves further scrutiny. Nonetheless, there is no reason to overgeneralize this evidence and claim that all tomb decoration would carry purely sepulchral meaning. It remains a defining feature of tomb decoration in metropolitan Rome that, across all motifs and themes, typically “sepulchral” subjects were neither the most common nor the most characteristic. The absence of concise symbols referring to an afterlife in tomb décor is consistent with their absence in funerary inscriptions, which are occasionally quite verbosely vague in thematizing a world beyond, and is simply the result of a lack of “dogmatically” binding concepts of an afterlife.

The Social Status of Tomb Patrons

The only reliable sources for determining the social status of those buried in decorated tombs are inscriptions. There are mainly two distinct types (Feraudi-Gruénais 2001, 155–157). The *titulus* inscriptions are square or rectangular, easily legible plates that were mounted on the façades over the entrances of chamber tombs. Often architecturally framed, they formed a characteristic component of the façades that lined the imperial “streets of tombs” ([Figure 22.3](#)). Their texts primarily name the builder or owner and the occasion (usually the death of a family member) for building the tomb. They often include legal and testamentary provisions as well, such as the dimensions of the plot of land, regulations pertaining to who may or may not be buried there, or penalties for grave desecration. Paying proper attention to these inscriptions is important for the interpretation of tombs and their décor. They help in dating the building and shed light on the social background of its owner and others buried there, as well as on their hierarchical relationships to one another.

The second group consists of inscriptions that were directly linked to deceased individuals: small marble plates (*tabellae*; [Figure 22.10](#)) mounted near the burial niches; functionally equivalent mosaic inscriptions on the covers of *fossae* in the ground ([Figure 22.11](#)); or inscriptions on sarcophagi, urns, and funerary altars. These texts are considerably shorter than those of the *tituli*. For scholars, their particular informational value lies, apart from details concerning name and age, primarily in their indication of family connections and the social background of the deceased. Since a tomb monument’s inscriptions complement each other in terms of function and information, socio-historical as well as diachronic interpretations gain most from their synoptic study. Unfortunately, tomb complexes are only very rarely preserved intact, but efforts to recontextualize inscriptions within their tomb chambers always lead to illuminating insights (Feraudi-Gruénais 2003). For nearly 10 percent of metropolitan Roman tombs with interior decoration, *tituli* identify the social status of their founders or owners; for another 40 percent, the *tabellae* and sarcophagus, urn, and altar inscriptions provide

information about the social class of the deceased, or the connections between intra-familial hierarchy and the location of burials inside the tomb.



Figure 22.10 Rome, Via Latina, Columbarium of Vigna Codini II, niches with marble plates naming the deceased individuals.

Photo: Phaedra – University of Vienna.



Figure 22.11 Rome, Via Portuensis, fossa mosaic from a chamber tomb (Via G. Ravizza), inv. MC 1235/S. Centrale Montemartini.

Photo: Archivio Fotografico dei Musei Capitolini.

This information shows that the owners of decorated tombs and those buried within them were members of the lower social classes: the spectrum ranged from simple slaves (*servi*) to imperial slaves and common freedmen up to freedmen of the imperial family and the freeborn

(*ingenui*). Those who erected the tombs were the *ingenui* and freedmen, but not the slaves. Having come into money, they possessed a household and possibly slaves as well; for them, owning a tomb was not only a practical necessity, but also an opportunity to make visible, through a monument of their own, their ownership of a household and their provision for it after death. Tombs and tomb decoration were therefore largely the product of wealthy members of the lower classes, with all conceivable social shadings reflected in the heterogeneity of the decor.

What Is New? Tomb Decoration Revisited

Tomb chambers are complex pictorial, textual, and even living spaces that are composed of various movable and immovable objects and places to display differing and interconnected layers of meaning. One of their constituent parts is non-movable tomb decoration. This may raise the question as to whether or not programmatic concepts can be deduced from the choice of subjects, particularly the mythical narratives, found within a single tomb. The answer, in sum, is negative: the ways in which themes and subjects were selected and combined nowhere indicate the presence of a stringent underlying program. Common basic constants of the mythical narratives are very general and never personalized allusions to various notions of dying or being violently snatched from life on the one hand, and to sublimation, redemption and destiny, or encounters with deities on the other. These characteristics stand beside fundamentally positive and desirable connotations of beauty, idylls, and repose in pleasant environments. The decorative design of Tomb C of the Via Portuensis, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter and characterized by paratactically arranged motifs and scenes that could similarly occur in home decoration, is only one illustrative example of this principle.

A single, thoroughly startling feature is the fact that the choice of myths for tombs of average decorative quality frequently referred to death, while such references are rare or lacking in tombs of larger size and more elaborate decoration (e.g., the Tomb of the Pancratii; Feraudi-Gruénais 2001, 108–114, 200). Yet, the percentage of tombs with mythical scenes is in fact very low overall. For the remaining, larger, and more representative group of chamber tombs, more “non-committal” subjects were selected, consisting of isolated mythical figures, incidents of human life, or objects, animals, and plants. The prevailing tone in most tombs is therefore characterized by an atmosphere of lightheartedness and vague supra-realism, without any firmly defined pictorial program.

It is interesting to note that comparable phenomena are lacking on sarcophagi. They do not show the same kinds of cheerful themes that ornament tomb walls. One characteristic of metropolitan Roman sarcophagi is the frequent equipment of mythical figures with the individual physiognomy of the deceased; this is understandable when we consider that sarcophagi were functionally much more directly linked to the actual funerary events than the walls, ceilings, and floors of tombs that served as neutral backdrops. This is not the place to discuss whether the mythological sarcophagi followed any stringent pictorial program. However, clearly, just like tomb decoration itself lacked a stringent program, there is also no evidence that the mythical narratives on sarcophagi and tomb decoration interacted in any

programmatic way. Both genres had their own fundamentally autonomous laws; no effort was made at programmatic coordination within specific tomb chambers. And yet, there is something that links them, simply because the personalized forms of sarcophagus decoration had to coexist and blend in seamlessly with the comparatively impersonal immovable tomb decoration. The subjects of movable and immovable tomb décor expressed different things and were more or less concrete in their messages, but in the end they mutually supplemented and enhanced their respective messages.

In the light of the rich thematic repertoire, we cannot avoid the question mentioned earlier of whether there were parallel developments in the content and/or iconography of sarcophagus and tomb decoration. The mythical narrative that is by far the most common in tomb décor and the second most popular on sarcophagi is the Rape of Proserpina ([Figures 15.4](#) and [22.6](#)). The iconographic changes in depictions of the rape on sarcophagus reliefs are linked to the modifications that affected sarcophagi in general, starting in the second half of the second century, when the myth was reduced and condensed to a few selected aspects with the goal of glorifying the deceased as an individual: Proserpina, who had initially resisted a forceful kidnapping with all her strength, increasingly became an abductee who appears to be pleased with her future role as Hades' lover and goddess of the underworld. Such de-mythologizing interventions in the iconography of mythical narratives in favor of emphasizing personal aspects are a well-observed phenomenon on sarcophagi. Tomb decoration may have undergone a similar process as the paintings of the same myth suggest (Feraudi-Gruénais 2001, 205). Provided that there are in fact parallel developments, which of these two genres gave rise to the impulse, whether they were related, and to what extent these phenomena may also have effected an iconographic shift in other mythical scenes are legitimate and fascinating questions that cannot be conclusively answered due to the fragmentary state of most tomb decoration.

In any case, on sarcophagi, de-mythologization served personalization. Apart from the iconographic manipulations described, this is apparent from the habit, starting in the Antonine period, of increasingly depicting the mythical protagonists with the portrait features of the deceased. No parallels for such phenomena exist in the immovable tomb decoration. This is surely not only due to the fact that there are so few surviving examples; we should rather recall that, unlike sarcophagi and their imagery, tomb decoration was only very rarely associated with specific deceased persons. There is no evidence that the faces of mythical figures in tomb decoration were left unfinished until the person died, as was frequently done on sarcophagi. It must be assumed, then, that no personification was actually undertaken here, and that in this respect the depictions were representative of universally applicable messages.

There is no empirically verifiable basis for expectations that visual artistic expressions in different visual media within the same contexts, or even of the same themes, should exhibit parallel developments or have interacted with one another. All claims that sepulchral contexts can be interpreted solely on the basis of sarcophagus research should thus be rejected all the more.

The fact that immovable tomb decoration with mythical subjects was already established approximately 150 years before the use of mythological sarcophagi leads to a further question:

namely, whether the figurative and particularly the mythical non-movable tomb decoration in fact significantly influenced the characteristics and long-term development of movable tomb décor, particularly that of the sarcophagi. This question can certainly be answered in the affirmative. At first it was the immovable décor of houses that served as a model for tomb decoration and developed in parallel with it. In the earliest tomb with preserved interior décor, the early Augustan Columbarium Doria Pamphili ([Figure 22.2](#); Feraudi-Gruénais 2001, 40–43), we already find an entire series of mythical scenes some time before mythical narratives were used on urns and funerary altars. Only later in the second century CE does the relationship appear to have reversed, to the effect that sarcophagi now served as thematic as well as iconographic models. For its first 150 years, tomb decoration drew on a repertoire of mythical themes that rarely featured in the contemporary types of movable funerary art and was also only marginally relevant for later movable décor. No one has yet been able to identify a persuasive reason for this in the pictorial content of the decoration, but it is clear that a new repertoire of mythical scenes emerged, undoubtedly under the influence of increasing sarcophagus production, the workshops for which had more opportunities for experimentation. House decoration, which had once been crucial, now lost its function as a model for tomb decoration, relinquishing the field to sarcophagus relief as the form that successfully established itself as the formative component of tomb décor from the second century CE onwards. As a result, decoration of cinerary urns and funerary altars followed the trend established by sarcophagi; the same applied to immovable tomb decoration, at least with regard to the new spectrum of themes.

The impulse to use mythical scenes in tomb décor at all was therefore first implemented and established in immovable tomb decoration. Although both immovable and movable forms of tomb décor underwent largely independent developments, it is nevertheless possible to identify numerous mutual influences. Accordingly, the décor of the tombs of metropolitan Rome was bound by notions that were equally influential in both spheres. In other words, immovable tomb decoration functioned as the “profane” shell for the movable inventory that referenced the sepulchral context far more directly—including even the deceased themselves.

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Feraudi-Gruénais (2001) offers a systematic overview of Rome’s tomb decoration, organized according to its location, and analyzed with a contextual approach to its themes. Gee (2003) is a complementary study of structural aspects of the visual impact of both tomb architecture and its interior layout and decoration, based on selected examples from the Vatican necropolis. The best-preserved and most instructive cemeterial areas of imperial Rome are those on the Vatican hill. For an overview of the interior decoration of the necropolis in Via Cornelia, Mielsch et al. (1986) and Mielsch and von Hesberg (1995) still remain essential. On the excavations along the Via Triumphalis with its well-preserved tomb contexts, see Buranelli et al. (2005/2006), Liverani and Spinola (2006), and Liverani et al. (2010); on third-century tombs see Borg (2013). The Tomb of the Nasonii on the Via Flaminia, with its particularly rich painted decoration that had suffered badly from decades of neglect, has been considered by

Messineo (2000). Blanc (1998) is a collection of several particularly informative contributions on the painted tomb decoration of Rome, Italy, and the provinces. Rostovtseff (1913/1914/2003) is an important “classic” of the history of scholarship in the field, and has more recently been translated into French. Its large number of lavish illustrations provides insight into the formerly splendid but now largely lost tomb paintings of southern Russia, their independence and adaptability in a region that is far removed from the center of the Empire.

On tomb architecture and the layout of necropoleis, see von Hesberg and Zanker (1987) and von Hesberg (1992); on those outside of Rome, see also Compostella (1995). A synopsis of more recent excavations in the metropolitan necropoleis is presented in AA.VV. (2002). Bodel (2000) and Rüpke and Scheid (2010) offer deep insights into funerary practices and rituals. On the significance and function of funerary inscriptions within the larger context of tombs and their decoration, see Feraudi-Gruénais (2003). The complex questions surrounding trans-real visions and concepts of an afterlife are discussed by Pekáry (1994), Criniti (1996), and Bodel (2004), and from a transcultural perspective by Michaels (2006).

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CHAPTER 23

Catacombs and the Beginnings of Christian Tomb Decoration

Norbert Zimmermann

From the end of the second to the beginning of the fifth century CE, the early Christian community in Rome buried its members in catacombs. With few exceptions, these subterranean necropoleis, often kilometers long and built in multiple layers into the volcanic tuff under the Roman Campagna, were completely forgotten during the Middle Ages. Starting in the early modern era, they were rediscovered relatively undamaged. The earliest documentation of Christian art in the western part of the Roman Empire is preserved in these Roman catacombs and their paintings, which allow us to understand its origins and development from the early third to the early fifth centuries. Given that paintings of this period are scarcely to be found above ground, the catacomb paintings form a kind of missing link between art from antiquity and the art of the early Middle Ages. Building on the underground tomb and grave types and the repertoire of Roman art of the imperial period, a new repertoire of Christian and predominantly biblical images was now created that was focused on expressing the concrete hopes of the deceased and their loved ones for resurrection from death. Acceptance of the initially persecuted new religion under Constantine (what is known as the Constantinian turn, Edict of Milan of 313) led to substantial growth of both the community and its cemeteries. Another consequence of support by the emperor was the incorporation of imperial motifs into Christian iconography and the monumentalization of burial chambers and images. In the final third of the fourth century, the introduction of depictions of revered martyrs meant that emphatic theological and therefore ecclesiastical messages were increasingly invading what had originally been a purely private pictorial world. The decline in population density in the fifth century meant that there was less need for underground burial space, thus ending the catacombs' function as a place of interment. Only the graves of martyrs were still visited as pilgrimage sites, as is evident by the latest paintings in their sanctuaries. When the relics were finally transferred to more sheltered and protected locations inside the city walls in the early Middle Ages, this function of the catacombs also ceased to be relevant and they were forgotten.

The gradual Christianization of burial customs and funerary art is characterized in equal parts by innovation and continuity, and therefore represents a typical example of the complex transformation processes of late antiquity (cf. Muth, [Chapter 21](#), and Bravi, [Chapter 7](#), this volume).

The Research so Far

A brief look at the history of research will serve to clarify its current state and interests. When the catacombs were rediscovered by chance in the sixteenth century, the Roman Catholic

Church immediately instrumentalized them for the Counter-Reformation. Because the earliest of the newly discovered Christian images were incorrectly dated to the late first century, the paintings appeared to confirm that the Catholic form of icon veneration dated to the immediately post-apostolic period. From then on, research long focused on hermeneutic aspects while engaging in an often polemical discussion of theological content or dogmatic messages in the Christian images (Deichmann 1983, 14–38). The material for this debate was provided by Bosio in 1632, when he expended Herculean efforts to compile a comprehensive documentation of the catacombs and all that had been found in them, which allowed the paintings to be analyzed in their physical context as early as the seventeenth century. Before the creation of classical archaeology and its methods, however, the early Christian monuments were thus established as a phenomenon decontextualized from the pagan world, and instrumentalized for apologetic purposes.

G.B. De Rossi conducted the first scholarly studies at the end of the nineteenth century, establishing Roman Christian archaeology in its present-day form with the catacombs as its most important monuments (De Rossi 1864–1877). His pupil J. Wilpert (Heid 2009) devoted himself to the paintings in particular; we have him to thank for the most comprehensive documentation of catacomb painting to date in descriptions and colored photo-aquarelles (Wilpert 1903). There were new discoveries after Rome became the capital following Italian unification in 1871 and the city grew beyond the boundaries of the Aurelian Walls. In the twentieth century, chronological benchmarks of the construction and use of the catacombs in the third and fourth centuries were developed from topographical and architectural analyses based on research by Styger (1933). In 1934, Wirth was the first to place the Christian paintings into the context of post-Pompeian painting and thereby into their pagan environment, even though many of the dates he proposed for stylistic developments are now in need of some correction. The desire to date the paintings by using stylistic analysis even without confirmed benchmark monuments subsequently produced many mutually incompatible studies (Kollwitz 1969; De Bryune 1969; see Reekmans 1973), the contradictions of which have still not been fully resolved today. At the same time, the ongoing discussion about the dating of paintings in the catacombs of Sts. Marcellinus and Peter (Deckers, Seeliger, and Mietke 1987; Deckers 1992; Guyon 1987 and 1994) raises the implicit question of whether important developments occurred before or solely with imperial support by Constantine. It now appears that any very narrow dating based on painting style alone can only rarely be supported by definitively dated monuments. A number of stylistic devices that appear simultaneously have also proved resistant to all attempts at dating them more exactly (Zimmermann 2002). Accordingly, the assessment of paintings should equally rely on their topographical position within the catacomb, their position in the architectural context, and the iconography of their scenes. This allows local manifestations in individual catacombs to be gradually reconciled with the established general stages of development.

By now, a general consensus has been reached that the paintings in the catacombs date to the third and fourth centuries, but when it comes to more detailed statements, opinions still diverge by up to 50 years. The pictorial content, on the other hand, is less controversial. Based on studies such as those by Dölger (1922–43) and Klauser (1967), Wilpert's dogmatic

Christological interpretations of the paintings were abandoned in favor of the idea of a pictorial language that developed step by step and in a process of reciprocal interplay with its pagan environment (Engemann 1997). There is no doubt today about the identification of individual scenes (Bisconti 2000). The entire stock of paintings has begun to be compiled in recent decades (Nestori 1993) and is in the process of being uniformly presented and categorized by catacomb. Meanwhile, more than half of the paintings have been recorded in archive indices (Deckers et al. 1987; Deckers, Mietke, and Weiland 1991 and 1994; Zimmermann and Tsamakda in prep.) or similar publications (Ferrua 1991; Saint Roch 1999). The paintings are therefore gradually catching up to other categories of ancient objects such as inscriptions and sarcophagi, which are already present in corpora (*ICUR* 1–10; Deichmann, Bovini, and Brandenburg 1967). However, by no means all paintings have already been documented or fitted into their original physical context, and the artificial alienation that developed in the history of research between “pagan” and “Christian” monuments has not yet been entirely overcome.

Characteristics of the Catacombs

The word “catacomb” is derived from the ancient place name of the underground Christian burial site of St. Sebastian on the Via Appia (*coemeterium ad catacumbas* from the Greek *kata kymbas*, “near the hollows”) and has been used since the sixteenth century for this kind of subterranean burial site (Fiocchi Nicolai, von Hesberg, and Ristow 2004, 378). To differentiate the term from the smaller, private *hypogea* (underground burial chambers), modern research understands “catacombs” as referring to relatively large communal cemeteries (or cemeteries of a specific community) that use underground tunnel systems for burials. The numbers of burial places available far exceed the needs of individual families, and their structures are devised in such a way that they could be successively expanded. Catacombs or *coemeteria* with similar structures, depending on the geological conditions, exist throughout the Mediterranean region (in Italy, including in Latium and Campania, Sardinia and Sicily, Malta, and Northern Africa; see Fiocchi Nicolai et al. 2004). However, only in Rome did the extraordinary need for burial space and the very suitable layers of tuff (De Angelis D’Ossat 1943) lead to such a systematic use of underground space.

Approximately 70 catacombs, about 50 of them with paintings, have been identified in the vicinity of the Aurelian Walls, including some Jewish ones (Rutgers 1995) and private *hypogea* (overviews in Pergola 1997; Fiocchi Nicolai 2001). The most common type of grave in the narrow tunnels (or galleries) with the widest distribution in all usage periods is the plain, shallow-wall burial niche (*loculus*), which suggests that providing burial space for the poorer classes was among the catacombs’ more important functions. In fact, care for the deceased was probably one of the reasons for the rapid growth of Christianity and even Julian the Apostate (emperor from 360–363), an avowed enemy of Christianity, mentioned this as an impressive characteristic of the Christian community (Julian, *Letters* 84). Among the other grave types were the more expensive arched recess graves (*arcosolia*) and individual tomb chambers (*cubicula*), usually family vaults (Nuzzo 2000). Currently, about 470 paintings have

been identified in all the catacombs altogether (Nestori 1993). These include a wide variety of different forms, ranging from completely painted cubicula, individually painted arcosolia, to individual loculi or even gallery walls that shared a common painted theme. Apart from the paintings, about 40,000 inscriptions have been preserved in the catacombs (*ICUR* 1–10), which reflect the development of the Christian mentality in their own way (Carletti 1988 and 1997). It is easy to forget today that the catacombs are only the underground part of *coemeteria* that also extended above ground, where they have only very occasionally been preserved or excavated. These contained grave gardens with individual mausoleums and the occasional larger buildings for collective burials or ritual acts in connection with the burial or commemoration of deceased persons or martyrs. The Constantinian ambulatory basilicas are surviving examples of such buildings (Fiocchi Nicolai 2001, 49–62). The burial sites above ground must also have been decorated with paintings, but since they are almost completely lost, we also have almost no information about what would have been the most important reference monuments for the underground architecture and furnishings.

The Emergence of New Tomb Architecture

Near the end of the second century CE, the Christian communities in the Roman Empire began constructing their own separate cemeteries, which became known as *coemeteria* (Brandenburg 1994). At the time, the process of developing an internal community structure under the leadership of the bishops had largely been completed, raising the desire for their own interment areas. Prior to that, Christian and pagan burials were practically indistinguishable. In Rome, the scarcity of burial space above ground and the Christian preference for inhumation in anticipation of corporeal resurrection led to the use of the underground, construction-worthy tuff sediment. At first, small private *hypogea* (e.g., the *hypogeum* of the Aurelii), abandoned *pozzolana* mines (so-called *arenaria*, e.g., the mausoleums under St Sebastian), or decommissioned cisterns (e.g., the Praetextatus Catacomb) were adapted for burials (Brandenburg 1984; Fiocchi Nicolai 2001, 15–32). In some catacombs, early nuclei can be identified in the form of a few winding galleries that were apparently built by private tomb owners for the burials of a large number of socially disadvantaged people (probably parish members). The donor's name was often linked to the *coemeterium* after it became community property and had grown into a larger cemetery, as is the case with the Catacomb of Domitilla or Priscilla. Other catacombs bear the names of martyrs buried there, such as Sts. Marcellinus and Peter. The legal status of these early sites is not entirely understood, but their architecture makes it clear that they were intended to be community *coemeteria*.

The written and archaeological records are in agreement regarding the oldest parish *coemeterium*: under Pope Zephyrinus (198–217), his deacon Callixtus devised the catacombs near the Via Appia that were later named after him as a grid with tunnels that were designed to be expanded (known as Area I, [Figure 23.1](#); Fiocchi Nicolai and Guyon 2006). This also allowed the bishop to fulfill his charitable obligation to bury the poor.

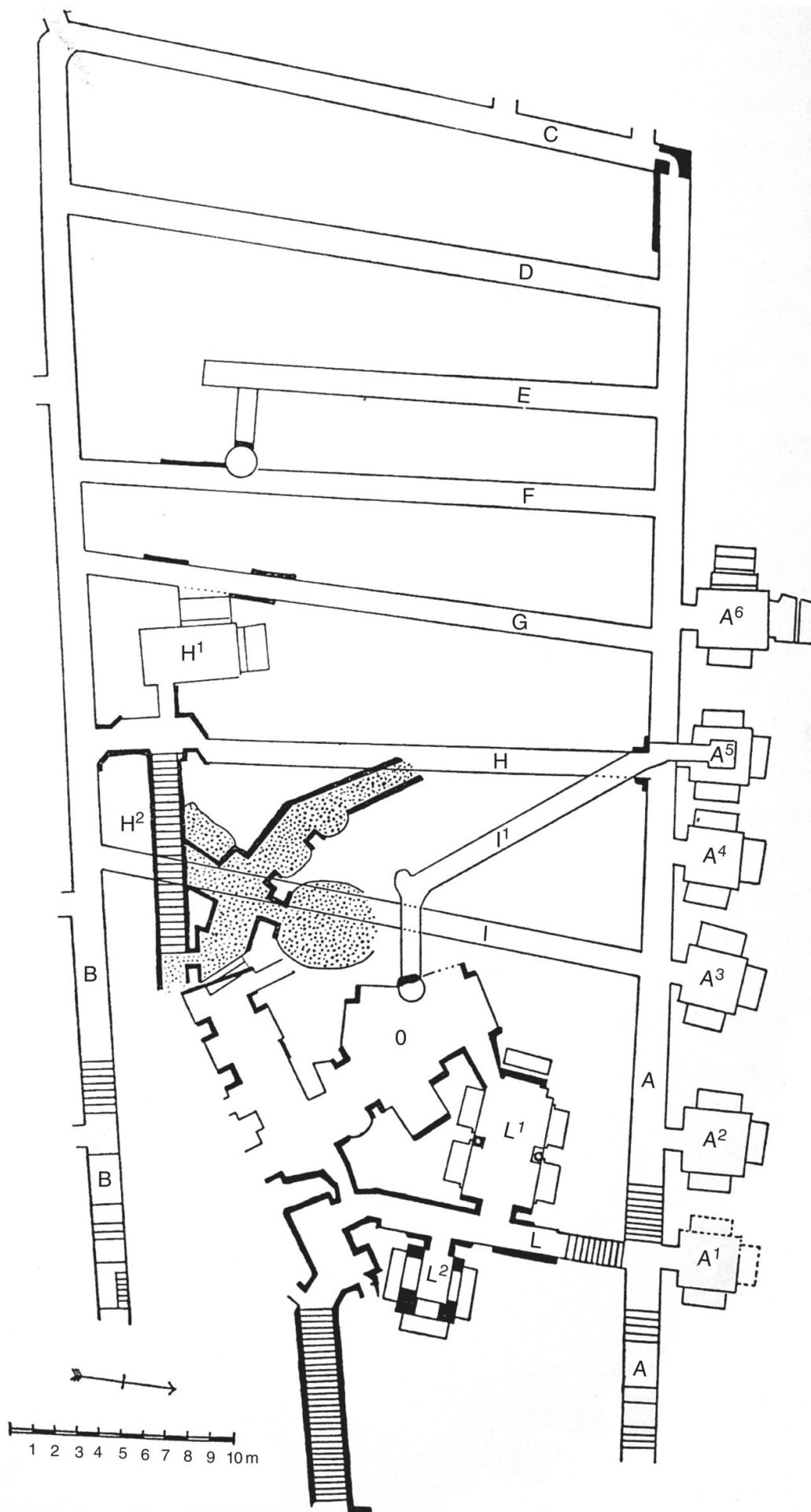


Figure 23.1 Area I of the St. Callixtus Catacomb.

After: P. Styger, *Die Römischen Katakomben* (Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, Berlin, 1933), p. 36, fig. 10.

There are indications that the community *coemeteria* were originally created without separate tomb chambers or paintings, which has been interpreted as an expression of a conscious renunciation of luxury and of the notion that all are equal in death. Whether this is true or not is unclear. It does seem, however, that over the course of the first generation of use, this reservation was given up and the more differentiated structures of the catacombs that followed became reflections of the actual social hierarchies within the community. More extravagant cubicula were soon created that also housed the first paintings. The furnishing of the private vaults of wealthier families was not merely tolerated by church leaders: the most recent research shows that the church itself selected a painted double cubiculum as a collective burial site in which at least nine bishops of Rome from Pontian (230–235) to Eutychian (274–283) were laid to rest. It is accordingly known as the Crypt of the Popes in the Catacomb of Callixtus (L1 in [Figure 23.1](#); Fiocchi Nicolai and Guyon 2006, 133–156). Yet, there is no indication at all that the church directly influenced, positively or negatively, either the introduction of paintings in itself or the selection of specific themes in the private chambers; in this respect, the images are separate from the church and should not be understood as denominational creeds, but rather as private expressions of personal hopes for the afterlife. Given that the tomb areas were sealed and only visited by family members during the burials themselves, and then once a year on the day the persons had died (the *dies natalis* of the new life), the paintings were not directed at a wider audience and maintained their meaning even without one. In any case, they are all unique and were only added on the tomb owner's orders and according to his or her wishes. The painters may often have been the gravediggers (*fossore*s) of the given complex, mainly because the quality of the paintings only rarely comes close to that of the above-ground painting studios. The existence of a shift in the way in which death and dealings with the dead were now perceived—namely as impure and therefore something to be kept away from priests and cult (Volp 2002)—is confirmed by the church itself, in that the fourth-century *fossore*s actually appear as the lowest rank of the ecclesiastical hierarchy (Conde Guerri 1979).

The development of the paintings can, in parallel with the development of the catacombs, be divided up into five stages, which are based on groups of monuments with features that show specific and characteristic changes both in the art and in the underlying mentalities.

The Development of Christian Tomb Painting

The earliest painted tomb chambers, such as those in the Callixtus Catacomb, were small, almost square rooms with flat or slightly arched ceilings in which loculus graves were uniformly distributed in rows, one above the other, on three equal walls. The surfaces between the loculi, beside the door, and on the ceiling were available for paintings. Initially, there was no main tomb that was emphasized by either the architecture or the painting. For the first time, we also find figurative representations of biblical events on white backgrounds, framed with

systems of fine lines, which are well known from the entirely schematized form of architectural painting (known as the red and green linear style) found in residential and tomb structures in Rome and Ostia.

The early third-century ceiling fresco in chamber Y of what is known as the Crypt of Lucina in the Callixtus complex ([Figure 23.2](#)) belongs to this earliest phase. Its walls are adorned with a circular system of fine red and blue lines that encloses decorative elements or general allegories of good fortune, such as (seasonal) geniuses, masks, birds, or baskets of flowers, but also figurative representations. The diagonal axes are adorned with a shepherd carrying a sheep and a female *orans* (woman at prayer), traditional embodiments of idyllic conceptions of happiness and personifications of the *pietas* (piety) of the deceased. The central medallion, however, contains the first attested depiction of the Old Testament story of Daniel among the lions, the only unambiguously Christian addition to the generic hopeful images. Daniel is likewise in the *orans* posture and the lions at his feet serve only to identify him, not to create a narrative scene.



Figure 23.2 Ceiling image from Cubiculum Y in Lucina.

After: J. Wilpert, *Die Malereien der Katakomben Roms* (Herder, Freiburg, 1903), pl. 25.

A series of similar chambers, known as the Chapels of the Sacrament A 1–6 ([Figure 23.1](#); Bisconti 2009), were established only a short time later in the nearby Callixtus Catacomb in the previously mentioned Area I between approximately 220 and 260: between the loculi that occupy three of the walls, we now find small scenes enclosed by a light network of lines

([Figure 23.3](#)). Biblical scenes appear alongside ornamental birds, *fossor* images meant to be interpreted as tomb guardians ([Figure 23.3](#), no. 8), and traditional images of a funerary banquet ([Figure 23.3](#), no. 10), the fisherman ([Figure 23.3](#), no. 4), and his counterparts orans ([Figure 23.3](#), no. 12) and shepherd; from the Old Testament, Abraham's sacrifice ([Figure 23.3](#), no. 11), Moses' parting of the Red Sea ([Figure 23.3](#), no. 2), and, in a cycle of three images, the story of Jonah ([Figure 23.3](#), nos. 3, 7, 13). The New Testament is represented by the Samaritan woman at the well ([Figure 23.3](#), no. 1), baptism ([Figure 23.3](#), no. 5), and the resurrection of Lazarus by Christ, who appears here as a beardless youth.

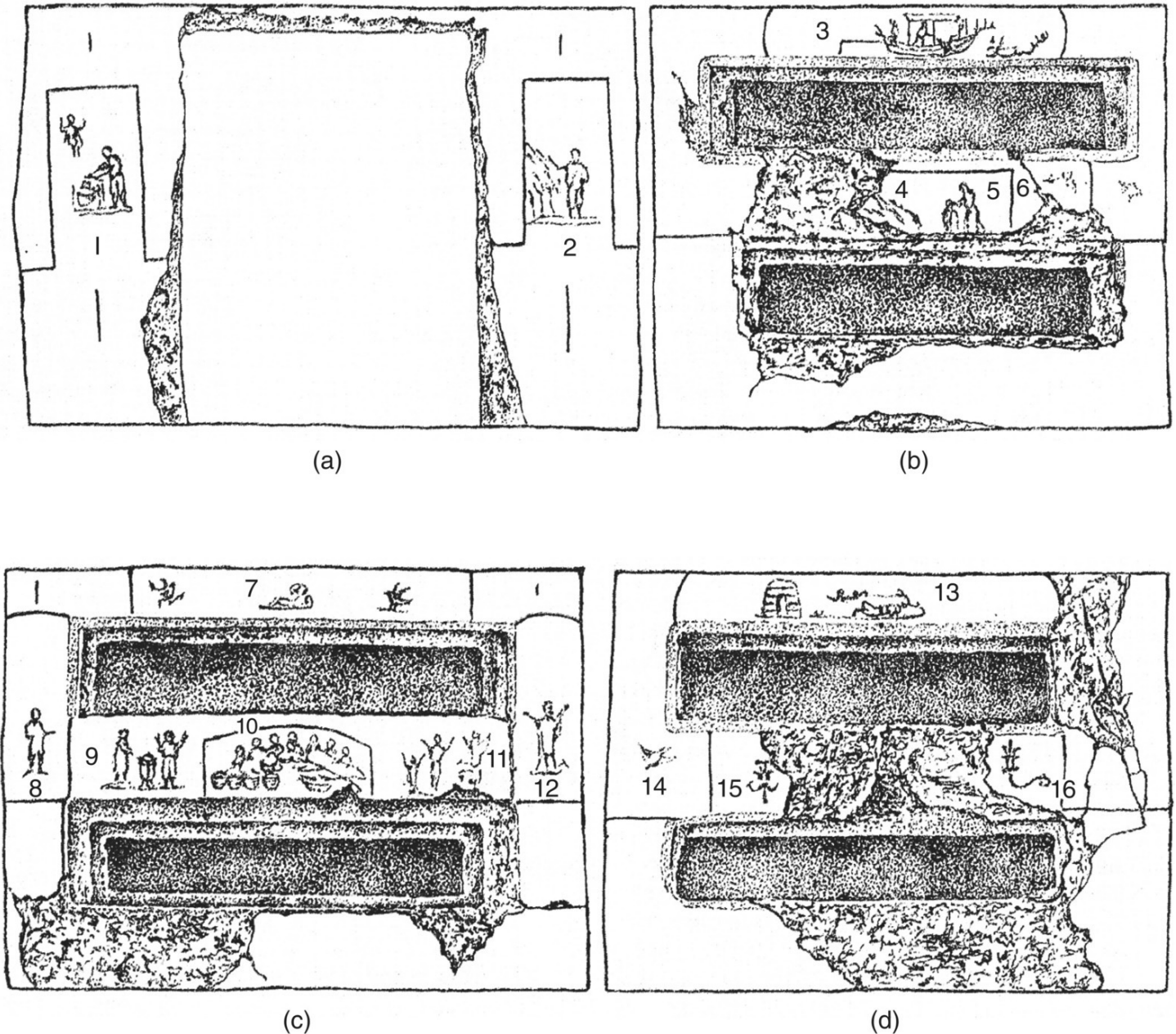


Figure 23.3 Chapel of the Sacraments A3, wall spool.

After: G.B. De Rossi, *La Roma sotterranea cristiana*, vol. 2 (Cromo-Lit. Pontificia, Roma, 1867), pl. next to D.

The early paintings are not characterized by any radical new beginnings. Instead, the Christian scenes were almost inconspicuously introduced into the traditional pictorial spaces of Roman tomb art in the form of small schematic images—there was no specifically Christian style that

could have contrasted with the prior pagan environment. This is quite clear in three similarly early, private hypogea from the early third century that were later integrated into the Catacomb of Domitilla. The Flavian Gallery is a 15-meter-long tunnel with niches for sarcophagus burials and loculi, painted entirely in the red and green linear style. Its images depict idyllic allegories of happiness and sacred landscapes (Giuliani 2000). The Ampliatus Crypt is one of two double cubicula at the foot of a steep staircase and stands out due to its unique architectural painting, which frames pastoral scenes and depictions of the peace among animals (Giuliani 2007). The cubiculum of the Good Shepherd, a large tomb chamber that originally accommodated two arcosolia amid a network of tunnels for loculus burials, appears to be closely related to the early Christian chambers (Pergola 1975). Its paintings contain three shepherds carrying sheep, and other bucolic scenes in a fine system of red and green lines. There are no unambiguously Christian elements in any of the three examples, although one must note that there was certainly a lot of space for burials in the galleries around the cubiculum of the Good Shepherd, which may indicate usage by Christians; all of them, however, use more elaborate and expensive architectural forms than those found in Callixtus.

The close connection between the Chapels of the Sacrament and these paintings is obvious. In Callixtus, pagan gods and sacrificial rites in their honor no longer appear in the context of Christian burials. Three traditional scenes, however, were imported directly and unchanged into the Christian pictorial world; namely, the shepherd carrying a sheep, the orans, and the dining scene. Over time, the shepherd ([Figure 23.2](#)) changes from the bucolic herdsman to the Good Shepherd Jesus, who often appears as a central figure all on his own, with the result that he is only recognizable as the shepherd of the Johannine parable by the Christian context. The iconography of the orans likewise remains identical, even though its significance as a personification of the piety accorded to gods and people ([Figure 23.2](#)) transforms over time into a representation of the deceased or bereaved persisting in Christian prayer for eternal life, which is likewise only deducible from the context of the surrounding scenes. This is also the case with the dining scene ([Figure 23.3](#), no. 10), which used to be identified as an image of a Eucharist, although that has not been proven and in fact appears unlikely. The depiction of diners, usually on a sigma couch, is now normally interpreted as a funerary banquet, which, in a Christian context, oscillates between a realistic meal shared by the bereaved at the tomb (*refrigerium*) and a prospective heavenly meal alluding to a future reunion with the deceased (Zimmermann 2010). Again, there are no specifically Christian details in the scene.

Entirely new, however, were the biblical images for which there were no previous models, and which thus had to be newly invented. The selection of the scenes was determined by the sepulchral context. Scenes for illustration were taken from Old and New Testament stories that focus on salvation and healing, capture pivotal moments of salvation history, or describe direct encounters between God and humankind. Moses drawing water by striking a rock in the desert, Abraham sacrificing his son Isaac, and Noah in the ark were among the popular Old Testament images and remained popular during the entire period. From the New Testament, the changing of water into wine at the wedding at Cana, the miracle of the loaves and fish, healing of the blind and lame, and particularly the raising of Lazarus from the dead were very popular. The scenes were all relatively loosely based on the pictorial tradition of the imperial era. In the

story of Jonah, therefore, a sea monster in the form of the traditional Greco-Roman *ketos* takes the place of the fish that swallows Jonah; we see Jonah resting naked under the arbor, his arm stretched behind his head in the pose of a sleeping Endymion; depictions of the Fall sometimes show Eve covering her nakedness in the same way as Venus Pudica does—wherever possible, artists fell back on suitable iconographic models for their pictorial creations. Early on, Christ regularly appeared as a young, beardless man, looking like a young philosopher.

Due to the limited space for images, the capacity for expressing the scenes was extremely reduced. Usually only the protagonists and their identifying attributes appear against a white background. The images evoke a known story, but do not function as a pictorial narrative. The biblical text does not say that Daniel stood naked and in the orans posture among the lions in their den, but these characteristics are expertly used to express the danger of the situation and his devotion to God. The lions are often not in a threatening posture but are rather, as we saw earlier ([Figure 23.1](#)), added as attributes. Generally speaking, it is usually clear right away why these scenes were selected in the sepulchral context. It is clearest in the statistically most frequent scene, Lazarus rising from the tomb, because Jesus' raising a dead person most directly converts the hopes of the bereaved into an image. There are only a few scenes, for example the depiction of Adam and Eve during the Fall, where one is dependent on the explanations provided by patristic texts; because the progenitors of humankind were considered the first people ever to be saved, they were also meaningful in a sepulchral context. It is a peculiarity of the biblical miracle scenes in the catacombs (and in the third and fourth centuries in general) that the supernatural power of the Christian God is iconographically illustrated by a kind of magic wand, the so-called *virga thaumaturgica*, which is used by the protagonists in the Old as well as the New Testaments (Tsamakda 2009). In the desert, therefore, Moses beats water from the rock with the same *virga* that Christ uses to transform water at the wedding at Cana, to multiply bread, or to resurrect Lazarus.

Iconographically, these early paintings have a certain tentative or experimental quality. For instance, Daniel remains clothed in Lucina ([Figure 23.1](#)), and in Callixtus, Lazarus walks out of his tomb *aedicula* (Wilpert 1903, pl. 46.2) rather than being immobile and wrapped like a mummy, as in later paintings. Abraham and Isaac, seen here next to one another at the sacrifice in the orans posture ([Figure 23.3](#), no. 11), later regularly appear with Isaac already kneeling before the altar: a fixed pictorial form had apparently not yet been established. In this respect, these images may in fact be at the very beginning of this development, even if they were not all necessarily invented in or for the catacombs, as is suggested by the Jonah cycle, which appears in its multiple-scene format already here.

The pictorial message is made specifically Christian through the combination of traditional symbols of happiness with biblical stories pertaining to the history of salvation. The addition of moments of salvation and revelation usually reinforces the express desire for salvation in the afterlife, without adding a new layer of meaning by programmatically combining certain images. While most of these images were derived from a long pictorial tradition, there is also a small group of scenes that have only been documented once and then seem to have disappeared from the scenic catalogue. In chamber A3 of the Chapels of the Sacrament in Callixtus, for example, we see a man and a woman in the orans posture with a table between

them ([Figure 23.3](#) no. 9), and a panel on the ceiling shows a table with seven bread baskets. Eucharistic interpretations have been proposed for both of these unique and cryptic images. What can be said is that these scenes had no successors and that the earliest clearly identifiable depictions of the Eucharist only appear at a much later date and independently of catacomb painting (Zimmermann 2010, 1125–1134). The image that gave the so-called Cubiculum of the Coronation in Praetextatus its name is also a singular scene (Wilpert 1903, pl. 18). Like the other images, this scene, which has been interpreted as Jesus being crowned with the crown of thorns, was not added to the pictorial repertoire.

Due to their small size, these early paintings, which always express their content in a very concise and formulaic way with only a few motionless figures, appear almost as prints rather than paintings, but their confident, naturalistic design and shading nonetheless link them closely to Severan painting.

Establishment during the “Little Peace” of the Church

The so-called Little Peace of the Church, the period between the persecutions by Valerian (257) and Diocletian (303–305), brought with it a phase of calm development and moderate growth. This period is reflected in numerous catacombs, such as Priscilla, Maius, Panfilo, or Sts. Marcellinus and Peter (Fiocchi Nicolai 2001, 33–47). In the paintings, a clear repertoire of about 20 Old and New Testament scenes was established. Apart from those already named, they included the three youths in the fiery furnace, Job, Susanna between the two elders, the prophet Balaam, Moses receiving the laws, and Noah in the ark from the Old Testament. The healing of the lame, blind, and bleeding were often selected from the New Testament. Depicted as the Good Shepherd, Christ himself now often stood in the center of the ceiling. Occasionally he was also depicted in the form of Orpheus; that is, in the form of a figure from Greco-Roman mythology that was suitable to symbolize him.

Representation of the deceased, traditionally a central concern of Roman tomb art, is a new element in this phase of the development of the catacombs. Wishes for the deceased were translated into the images quite directly, by depicting the deceased in conjunction with biblical images of salvation (Zimmermann 2007). From then on, many variants of portraits of the deceased, often distinctly individualized, were regularly included in the paintings, to the point of becoming their single most common theme. To name but a few examples: in the chamber of the “Cinque Santi” of Callixtus (c. 280–290), the five deceased are depicted as orantes standing in a garden of paradise above the acrosolium in the main wall of the chamber, suggesting that the wish *in pace* (in peace) that was added to the inscription of their names has already been fulfilled (Wilpert 1903, pls. 111, 112). Also, in the cubiculum of the “Velatio” (the taking of the veil) in the Priscilla Catacomb, the deceased appears as an orans in large format on the rear lunette, in this case between scenes from her life: to the left, possibly during her wedding, and to the right as a mother with a small child in her arms (Wilpert 1903, pls. 79–81). She is surrounded by the Good Shepherd in the center of the ceiling and Old Testament scenes (the sacrifice of Abraham, the three youths in the fiery furnace, Jonah: Wilpert 1903, pls. 66.1, 78.1–2) on the remaining walls, specifically on the surfaces created by the arches of

the groined vault. Apart from the very frequent orans posture, the deceased may also appear in portraits showing only their head and shoulders, for example in round portrait medallions or angular panels, in depictions of professional activities from their lives, or in other narrative contexts. The latter include funerary banquets with all the family or incorporations of the deceased into images with salvific content. The latter can be expressed by means of gardens or stars in the background, which directly allude to paradise. In rare cases, private persons are also included in biblical images or even identified with biblical figures. The person of Christ is, of course, out of the question, but the deceased could, for example, be identified with Daniel in the lion den, Susanna between the two elders, or, from the New Testament, the Samaritan woman at the well simply by giving these figures contemporary hairstyles and clothing, which immediately suggested that the deceased was participating in these salvific events.

The onset of representational images was clearly accompanied by a trend toward larger pictorial formats for individual scenes and an emphasis on the main wall of the tomb chambers, which can be seen in the cubicula in region X in Sts. Marcellinus and Peter, for example. This connection of images of salvation and rescue, repeated like a mantra, with the image of the deceased engaged in representative activities, remained crucial from then on. Both aspects—self-representation at the tomb and expressions of the Christian hope for salvation from death—form the central concern of the paintings from this point. Stylistically, the framing lines that previously formed light systems were broadened, and the figures became larger and heavier, while the naturalistic appearance of their bodies decreased in importance: the changes of style under the Tetrarchs resulted in harder, almost misshapen figures.

Imperial Support after Constantine

Constantine's victory in 312 brought on a profound change and the Edict of Milan in 313 cemented the free practice of the Christian religion. Within a few years, the church went from a persecuted enemy of the state to an institution with imperial support. The now rapidly growing number of Christians in all social classes, including the rich and members of the court, led to sharp growth of the catacombs and monumentalization of tomb forms and paintings. As on the Constantinian frieze sarcophagi, this is initially expressed in the staccato juxtaposition of the new salvific scenes, which were now significantly growing in size and appear to be breaking out of the old pictorial spaces, as is quite evident on a gallery wall in the catacomb of the Jordanians ([Figure 23.4](#)). The central loculus is surrounded by an abundance of new salvific images: from the upper left, they are Moses' water miracle, the multiplication of bread, the adoration of the magi, a depiction of the deceased with two children in the orans position, and finally Noah in the ark with the resurrection of Lazarus underneath. Below the loculus, we see Daniel in the lion den, Tobias with the fish, and the healing of the lame: the mass of salvific images from both testaments appears to be intended to secure the salvation of the deceased depicted in the orans images.

At the same time, the chambers became larger and their architecture became more impressive, with groined vaults resting on columns and main burials being emphasized by acrosolia. These

new structures created new spaces for images on the arches of *arcosolia* and in their lunettes; these spaces were used to separate and grade layers of content and to express pictorial hierarchies. The most important scenes filled the lunettes, while salvific and representational images were placed in symmetric or axial relation to one other on arches, ceilings, and entryway walls, with the selection being based both on their content (e.g., Old and New Testaments: Moses' water miracle and raising of Lazarus) and/or on their iconography (e.g., scenes with similar structure and focus, such as bread and wine miracles). Only rarely were biblical scenes forced into the narrow spaces between *loculi*. Despite the fact that there were now often larger spaces available for decoration, the new larger format of the scenes did not usually result in a larger number of scenes altogether.

The imperial influence also had a lasting impact on the iconography. The image of Christ was "imperialized": imperial attributes or insignia were ascribed to him such as the nimbus and the color purple; images of Christ teaching, surrounded by his apostles, are now clearly influenced by images of the enthroned emperor and his court. This scene with Christ in the middle and his disciples seated to his left and right, identified as a gathering of the apostles, is not an illustration of a biblical event, but rather a theme that transcends time and can clearly be traced back to theological reflection (Wilpert 1903, pl. 148.2). The pictorial space used by the scene is semi-circular. It is therefore quite possible that the gathering of apostles first arose as an apse image in the emerging space of Christian worship—the church building in the form of a long basilica with an apse at the far end. It is no accident that new "courtly" scenes, such as the adoration of the magi, appeared at that time ([Figure 23.4](#)). New Testament miracle and salvation scenes became substantially more prominent, for example the healing of the bleeding, paralyzed, or blind. The mechanisms behind the designs of such new scenes, such as the gathering of the apostles with a throne and footstool (*suppedaneum*), or the adoration of the magi with offerings of golden wreaths (*aurum coronarium*) on silver trays, shows the unfettered use of old "pagan" pictorial motifs, which are mixed and matched into new Christian pictorial content. Depictions of the personal, concrete desire for salvation remained quite varied, however, consistently seeking new ways of connecting the portraits or orant representations of the deceased with the salvific images. There was obviously no fixed iconographic form of expressing the theme of personal salvation or entering into God's presence, because each individual image appears to be an equally individual expression of the same unchanging wish.



Figure 23.4 Loculus wall in the Catacomb of Jordanians.

After: J. Wilpert, *Die Malereien der Katakomben Roms* (Herder, Freiburg, 1903), pl. 212.

Among the most important of the paintings that were influenced by the Peace of the Church and allow us to understand the subsequent changes are those in the catacomb of Sts. Marcellinus and Peter. Because there are so many of them, these paintings allow us to comprehend the structural changes in architecture and pictorial distribution, ranging all the way from the earlier chambers (region X), where scenes appeared in small chambers between loculi, and the later, larger cubicula (in the so-called Agape Region), which were arranged lengthwise and housed arcosolia (Deckers et al. 1987; Guyon 1987; Zimmermann 2002, 163–241). The catacomb that was discovered on the Via Latina in 1956, known today as the Hypogaeum of the Via Dino Compagni (Ferrua 1991), have also aroused substantial interest. They were probably a privately owned complex or an isolated part of a parish catacomb. There are three complete cubicula A–C in the front area with depictions of numerous Christian scenes, many of which have only been documented on this site (Ferrua 1991, 59–97). While chamber B only allows one to marvel at the abundance of uncommon scenes, the contents of the paintings in chamber C are also uniquely intertwined with one another, creating a pictorial program. A salvific narrative frieze showing scenes of the exodus from Egypt wraps around all of the walls, which is the first application of the typical Roman form of a continual pictorial frieze to a biblical story. The large number of unique scenes found here has led to the supposition that the painters used a specific external model for their images: an illustrated Bible manuscript, for example. This phase is characterized by solid systems of framing lines around large images comprising tall and elongated figures, which occasionally adhere once more to the classical ideals of beauty with their relatively small heads.

Apex in the Mid-Fourth Century

Monumental structures reached their high point in the middle of the fourth century. Cubicula were occasionally built as ovals or as four-, six-, or eight-cornered rooms with columns in the corners and quasi-entablatures or domes. Imitations of marble in the base areas and geometric ornamentation on the surfaces of arches and vaults were popular painted forms of decoration. Portraits of the princes of the apostles, Peter and Paul, who were so important for Rome, entered the otherwise largely unaltered pictorial repertoire in this period, often flanking a depiction of the enthroned Christ. Interest in the face of Christ himself also increased at the time, and the image of the bearded, older Christ, iconographically connected to the Roman father deities, started to appear alongside the youthful philosopher Jesus. This bearded Jesus could now not only preside over the gathering of the apostles but, as a separate portrait, could also occupy central surfaces on ceilings and floors, and gradually replaced the Good Shepherd, as is shown by the five occurrences in the Catacomb of Domitilla.

Again, the painting style of this period is also found in some private hypogea. A continuously painted sequence of rooms in the rear section of the Via Latina Catacomb (chambers D–O; Ferrua 1991, 97–152) shows an extraordinary juxtaposition of traditional and new Christian myths. Heracles is depicted with his patron goddess Athena, with Alcestis brought back from the underworld, or victorious against the Nemean lion and the Hydra; the selection and compilation of mythological content follow the semantically similar content of the biblical stories. The irritation that is often expressed by scholars about the extraordinary juxtaposition, however, appears to be more a result of modern expectations than a confirmation of syncretism in late antiquity. Evidently, hopes for the afterlife could be reflected in traditional Greco-Roman myths even in Christian tombs without creating a conflict. It is not only Christian images that demonstrate how widespread eschatological hopes for a life after death were, or show attempts to express that desire by means of images. Jewish paintings, for example those in the catacombs in the Villa Torlonia, connect Jewish religious objects (menorah, Torah shrine, shofar, lulav) with cosmic symbols (sun and moon) to form an apocalyptic dimension. Vincentius, priest of the god Sabazius, also dedicated a unique memorial to his late wife Vibia in the famous arcosolium in the eponymous Catacomb of Vibia (Wilpert 1903, pls. 132–133). In the paintings on the arch, Vibia is first brought into the underworld on a chariot by Pluto, following the pictorial tradition of the abduction of Proserpina. There, Hermes leads the deceased before the judge's throne and, after a positive verdict, the lunette shows an *angelus bonus* (good angel) escorting her into paradise, where she participates in the feast of the blessed. Vincentius himself is already present in paradise. The desire for a happy life after death is thus not a purely Christian concern. By contrast, the pictorial program in the hypogaeum of Trebius Justus (Rea 2004) is entirely limited to various kinds of representative images commissioned by the mourning parents, with the intent of creating a visual memorial for their deceased son showing his wealth, his education, and activities from his daily life. Again, all of these paintings share an increasing lack of natural proportions and body forms in their large, often bulky figures; naturalistic lighting and shading were replaced with uniform contour lines that could also ornamentally dissolve limbs or garments. The faces are dominated by large eyes with heavy contours.

Final Flowering under Damasus

From the middle of the fourth century, above-ground cemetery chapels (ambulatory basilicas) gradually began to replace the catacombs. The final bloom of catacomb painting came in the last third of the fourth century when, under Pope Damasus I (366–384), ritual veneration of persecution-era martyrs was systematically propagated and their tombs were furnished with their own stairways, light wells, and monumental presentation, with marble inscriptions and architecture (*Saecularia* 1986). Since Christian theory holds that only martyrs stand in the face of Christ without having to wait for the final judgment, only they could be direct advocates for the deceased who were forced to await that final judgment. Accordingly, martyr theology was echoed strongly in the images. One of the best-known examples from the Domitilla Catacomb is dated to the late fourth century and shows the deceased Veneranda being led into a paradise garden by the martyr St. Petronilla ([Figure 23.5](#)). The structure of the tomb chambers also changed again in this period. The structures were focused on a main apsidal image, often showing the enthroned, now bearded Christ between Peter and Paul or the gathering of the apostles. Dark, colored backgrounds and framing networks of wide red and black lines dominated. They were clearly imitating the influential design of above-ground cult spaces. The best example of this is Chamber 33 of the Domitilla Catacomb, which imitates the spatial arrangement of a basilica by having an apsidal image (the gathering of the apostles) on the main wall and figurative friezes on the side walls (Wilpert 1903, pls. 231, 225.1). Space and images are not designed around the burials, but the burials are fitted into chambers inspired by religious spaces, oriented toward an apsidal image at the far end of a long axis, with the result that any direct relationship between the images and the sepulchral context increasingly diminished (Zimmermann 2002, 244–246). From this point on, it can be suspected that the church or theologians were the ones commissioning these subterranean chambers in imitation of developments above ground. The ceiling image in the chamber near the martyrs' crypt in Sts. Marcellinus and Peter ([Figure 23.6](#)), which dates to the early fifth century and therefore to the last phase of regular catacomb burials, clearly depicts Christian theology in its hierarchical organization. The haloed Christ is enthroned between the main saints of the catacomb, who reverently approach in two registers. The martyrs now propound the hopes and desires of the deceased, who no longer appear in the image themselves. Their hope is symbolized by and condensed in the eschatological lamb on the mountain from which the four rivers of paradise flow. The body shapes with symbolic exaggerations of faces and hands, the ornamental draping of the garments, and the unnatural gradations of light and shadow are entirely atypical of the art of antiquity and already anticipate the Middle Ages. With the exception of an early medieval group of relatively uniform cultic images on martyrs' tombs (Farioli 1963; Osborne 1985), the tradition of Roman catacomb painting ended with that, especially since the need for underground burials diminished due to the population decline and the Gothic raids of the fifth century.



Figure 23.5 Arcosolium of Veneranda in the Catacomb of Domitilla.

After: J. Wilpert, *Die Malereien der Katakomben Roms* (Herder, Freiburg, 1903), pl. 213.



Figure 23.6 Ceiling painting in the Catacomb of Sts. Peter and Marcellinus.

After: J. Wilpert, *Die Malereien der Katakomben Roms* (Herder, Freiburg, 1903), pl. 252.

In retrospect, it is possible to identify an overarching development of catacomb painting, despite the fact that what evidence we have survived purely by chance. This development goes all the way from the first tentative attempts at Christian imagery to programmatic

representations of complex theological reflection. With the exception of small art objects, a similar development in Christian iconography in the city of Rome can only be traced in the iconography of the sarcophagi, which, however, began approximately two generations later in the last third of the third century and, like catacomb painting, ended along with the fourth century (Koch 2000). However, at the start of the fifth century, we again have evidence above ground: the apse of Santa Pudenziana, for example, and the mosaic cycle in Santa Maria Maggiore a short while later.

Open Questions

As the first section of this chapter has shown, research so far has provided us with a general understanding of the contents and stages of development of the catacombs and their art, and has often examined them from a theological perspective. Improving said understanding would require more intensive research into the details of all of the monuments and their micro-histories. For a large number of sites, no archaeological research has ever been done on the architecture and the construction methods with standard modern methods, with the result that any such work will undoubtedly lead to a more precise chronology and a better understanding of the history of their usage. This is just as essential for interpreting catacomb art as is the long-awaited publication of all of the paintings. On the other hand, this would also enable a better contextualization of the art: a first step might be limited to the narrow field of the pictorial spaces in the chambers, which could be considered in conjunction with the architecture and inscriptions surrounding them. This could be followed, perhaps even more interestingly, by a better overview of the interactions with the above-ground reality of the late Roman, and increasingly Christianized, world. As the research progresses, almost every iconographic theme deserves a new, independent investigation. Yet even more important is that the pictorial contexts are analyzed according to modern criteria of iconographic research, and are compared with the sarcophagus images in order to determine their characteristics and implications. In this respect, catacomb art, which just happened to have become the most important document of this phase of the late antique iconographic world due to its chance survival, must no longer be considered in isolation, but integrated into a wider perspective in order to benefit from interactions with the discipline of classical archaeology and its current questions.

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Fiocchi Nicolai, Bisconti, and Mazzoleni (1999) and Pergola (1997) offer compact and up-to-date introductions to catacomb research and its specialized areas. The best, most complex information on every single catacomb, with discussion of the ancient sources and a complete bibliography, is given in the *LTUR, Suburbium*. For the development of the catacombs, see Fiocchi Nicolai (2001) and Fiocchi Nicolai and Guyon (2006). The paintings can be found via the catalogue of iconography and topography in Nestori (1993); for photographs of them, see earlier. Bisconti (2000) comprehensively introduces the iconography of Christian scenes; the most important results of the most recent restorations can be found in Bisconti (2011) and

Mazzei (2010). For the content and meaning of the scenes, see Engemann (1997). The series *Monumenti di Antichità Cristiana, Roma Sotterranea Cristiana, Studi di Antichità Cristiana*, and *Sussidi allo studio delle Antichità Cristiane*, published by the Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, includes monographs on this topic. Alongside current research results, detailed studies, and reviews related to catacomb research, the PIAC's *Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana* also publishes the reports of the Pontificia Commissione di Archeologia Sacra, which manages the catacombs. Additionally, the PIAC maintains the Wilpert archive (Heid 2009) and stores Wilpert's watercolors, while the PCAS manages the archive of the catacomb excavations as well as the photo archive, which contains many unpublished photographs.

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CHAPTER 24

The Greek East under Rome

Roland R.R. Smith

In what senses, if any, can art in the eastern Mediterranean during the Roman imperial period be called “Roman”—without qualification, perhaps only in the sense of “belonging to the Roman period”? This chapter describes and tries to explain the following paradox: much of what was new and different in the visual and monumental culture of the Greek east was due in some way to Rome; at the same time, however, little of it was intended or probably experienced by contemporaries as anything other than, in political-cultural terms, neutral, local, or Hellenic.

Introduction: Cities

The Roman Empire was a network of small urban communities that we call “cities.” In the western provinces, the cities were mostly recent foundations and followed Roman new-town architectural designs with remarkable consistency. Their temples, sanctuaries, and forum–basilica complexes expressed the aspiring Roman character and allegiance of the local elites, and their statues, gravestones, and imperial-style Latin inscriptions looked directly to Rome and Italy. In the Greek east, already at the start of the imperial period, most cities had several centuries of urban history behind them. They had huge reservoirs of earlier art and monuments, much of it regarded as of exemplary status, still in use and on display. At the same time, the Empire was a heavily interconnected place—craft personnel, materials, and ideas moved around a lot—and there was genuine and intense interaction. Some interaction was the natural result of the movement of people and ideas, but much of it was the conscious result of careful reflection and choice. Whatever happened in the art of the Greek cities under Rome, it was the result of protracted cultural negotiation: between Greek and Roman, between Greek and local non-Greek, and between old Greek and more recent Greek.

In abstract terms, there was of course a slow shift to a visual and material culture that looked and was more “Roman.” One might say that in the first century of the Empire, Greek cities maintained a broadly Hellenistic character, and in the second century they came to employ more Roman imperial forms. Architectural ornament, for example, can be made to tell this story: by the Antonine age, one could travel from Britain to Syria and see the same distinctive kind of heavily decorated entablature on high-status buildings ([Figure 24.1](#)). The homogeneity was impressive. However, this was hardly true, for example, of public statues or grave reliefs. And even for architectural ornament, we need to be aware of the difference between what seems Roman in form and meaning to us and what seemed Roman at the time. The difference is between an abstract, essentialist description—this molding *is* Roman—and historical evaluation of what was “marked” and experienced as Roman.



Figure 24.1 Majesty of imperial-style temple architecture. Cornice of main temple at Heliopolis-Baalbek. Later first century CE.

Photo: R.R.R. Smith.

Archaeology does not translate directly or easily into history. Moldings remain a good example. The entablatures of the temple of Vespasian in Rome (Nash 1981, vol. II, 504, fig. 1323), of the tetrapylon at Aphrodisias (Paul 1996), and of the temples at Baalbek ([Figure 24.1](#); Wiegand 1925) might all well illustrate the idea of the authority and majesty of the Roman imperial state. Yet we might pause to wonder if they might not have meant different things in their respective cities. Indeed, we might consider whether these architectural forms had not been so thoroughly internalized in Aphrodisias and Baalbek that they were considered to ennoble and intensify the prestige less of Rome than of the deities whose sanctuaries they adorned. In Aphrodisias and probably in Baalbek, these deities were of a distinctive local form and identity: not Greek or Roman, but respectively Anatolian and Syrian. We need to be ready to see that such highly effective forms could be put to new local work that elided their point of origin. That is, the increasingly “Roman” tenor of visual culture and monuments under the Empire in the second century might not be quite what it seems.

At the same time, a narrative of increasing Romanness is surely weak if its logical corollaries

are decreasing Hellenism and decreasing localism. There was much that was “Roman” in the cities of the early Empire, just as there was much that was emphatically Hellenic later. The truth is, of course, that these cities were complex cultural entities for which simple narratives are not sufficient. Throughout the period Greek, Roman, and local elements are present in different combinations, contexts, and media, usually depending on the subjects and purposes of the monuments concerned. To get at some of these complexities, I will consider four major zones where different subjects and functions intersect in distinct building and monument categories: the realm of the emperor; the realm of the gods; the realm of the citizen; and the realm of the dead. These four zones were of course closely connected in the fabric of the city, but they are convenient horizontal sections through the material. If we ask in what ways did monuments of the Greek world concern themselves with Roman ideas, we can see that the answers are not neat or predictable.

Realm of the Emperor

The first big new Roman phenomenon with which the Greek cities had to concern themselves was the emperor. The powerful presence of the ruler and his family in statues, temples, and festivals was no doubt clearly marked as Roman to local citizens. Studies of the emperor in cult, in statues, and in narrative reliefs, however, have shown in different ways how far the emperor was remodeled in the Greek east. The initiative to honor the emperor was always local, and he was generally accommodated in existing forms of worship and honorific practice (Price 1984).

Roman arena games (gladiator dueling and beast hunts), for example, were extensively mounted in Greek cities as part of the emperor’s festivals (Robert 1940). They were, however, rarely given their own purpose-built Roman-style amphitheaters. The games were put on in theaters and stadia, partly converted for this purpose. Roman games were a significant priority—they were taken into local culture and were clearly much appreciated—but it was not a priority to represent their *Roman* character in their own distinctive building type. A practical argument might also have been deployed: outside the time of imperial festivals, such amphitheaters would have sat empty and unused. Buildings in which the emperor received divine honors show well the variety of local initiative. No model was available and none was imposed. The emperor and his family might have, for example, a room in a stoa (Kalindoia: Adam-Veleni 2008, 124–168), a Greek-style peripteral temple (Flavian temple at Ephesus: Scherrer 2000, 92), or a frontal Roman-style podium temple (Sebasteion Aphrodisias: Smith 2013, 28–30). Roman temple designs were clearly well understood, but even for so obviously a Roman subject as the emperor, it was hardly automatic or predictable that “Roman” designs would be used.

Authoritative versions of the emperor’s approved public image were made available from Rome (probably as busts), but they were adapted and recast in local statues according to context and local preference (Zanker 1983). These local statues were named and inscribed in Greek—often with little concern for accuracy in names and titles. In well-documented Greek cities, we can see that the statues of the emperor and his family were part of a wider practice

of honoring locals, and the statues of imperial figures were very much in the minority. This was no twentieth-century-style, image-controlled society in which the dear leader's image was the only one on public view. After an initial variety of costumes (nude, toga, cuirass), the emperor was shown from the second century most often in the cuirass of the Roman commander. It became his defining costume. The reformulation of the emperor's image made him as much a separate "imperial" figure (*autokrator Kaisar Sebastos*) as a "Roman" figure. At the same time, he never became explicitly "Greek" either: the emperor's statues, as far as we know, never wore the Greek civilian himation. (The himation statue from Cyrene with a separately added head of Hadrian has always been an exception, and is surely a late antique confection: Borg 2004b, 158n6.) Neither in Rome nor in the Greek east was it thought appropriate for the emperor to cross this line.

The variety of local remodeling of the emperor in busts, statues, and their inscriptions is impressive, but it is in two great relief cycles that its full extent can perhaps be best gauged: the reliefs from the Julio-Claudian Sebasteion at Aphrodisias and the frieze of the Antonine altar at Ephesos.

The two local families who built the Aphrodisias Sebasteion were well aware of Roman models, and one family used a borrowed sequence of reliefs of personifications of *gentes* or *nationes* of the Empire to decorate the north building of the complex (Smith 1988 and 2013, ch. 3). That the designs were taken directly from a Roman monument is clear (among other reasons) from the stark and jarring problem faced in translating not the images, but their inscribed labels. *Nationes* are feminine in Latin, but in Greek (*ethnē*) they are neuter. The borrowed names and labels for the figures in the nominative were therefore translated into Greek in the genitive: for example, Latin *natio Dacorum* became in Greek *ethnous Dakōn*, meaning probably "(sc. image of) the *ethnos* of the Dacians"—a rather desperate grammatical stratagem to avoid the worse offense of posting a neuter nominative label beneath an obviously female figure.

The other Aphrodisian family made different choices in the south building (Smith 2013, chs. 4–5). In the upper stories of its three-storied façade, they deployed a series of mythological reliefs below a series of Olympian gods and Roman emperors. The mythological reliefs present the deeds of heroes of the past—each scene crafted after its best-known, most recognizable classical or Hellenistic model. They were much more than merely "Greek" in range and meaning. They include local founder heroes, local gods, regional stories, and heroic deeds that stand as the best paradigms for the deeds of the imperial gods in the register above. The reliefs featuring emperors and imperial scenes are interspersed with images of Victory and the Olympian gods. The emperors are thus represented as part of the local pantheon, a new dynamic addition to the Olympian executive. This idea is captured effectively in Greek in one of the building dedications "to the *Theoi Sebastoi Olympioi*"; that is, "to the Olympian Emperor Gods." Similar thinking informs the comprehensive restyling of the emperors as Hellenistic-style warrior-heroes. Claudius, for example, becomes now a new Achilles, now a savior-ruler of land, sea, and the universe ([Figure 24.2](#)). There were no models publicly available in Rome for this extraordinary and unpredictable vision of Julio-Claudian rule. Local sculptors and designers reformulated Hellenistic power images to shape their own

visual conception of imperial rule. It was the purpose of these reliefs to collapse the easy differences between real, contemporary figures with portrait features and heroic, divine figures with “ideal” features. Here, the emperors become Olympian gods and Hellenistic-style heroes. In this most Roman of imperial-period institutions in the Greek east, the emperors were shown in this case in an emphatically Hellenistic vein. Obviously locals recognized the subjects venerated in this complex as Roman, but their Roman identities were co-opted and reformulated in images, in line with local idiom. Their emphasis was less on “Roman,” more on “emperor” conceived locally, in an unusually explicit formulation, as a *Theos Sebastos Olympios*.

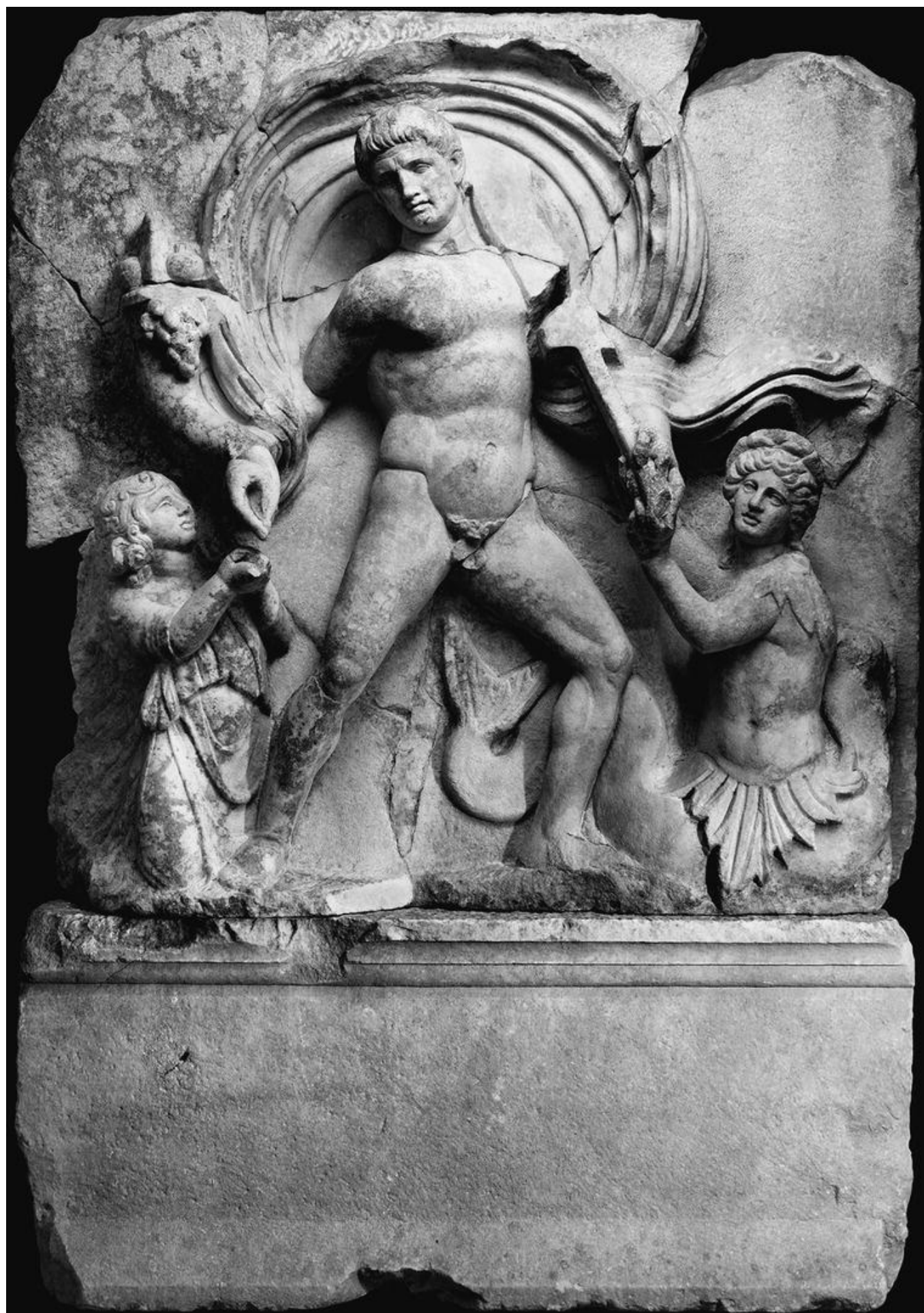


Figure 24.2 Emperor as Olympian saviour. Claudius with land and sea figures. Relief from Sebasteion at Aphrodisias. Mid-first century CE.

Photo: Courtesy of the New York University Excavations at Aphrodisias.

The idea of a specifically imperial vision of the emperor is made sharper in the Antonine altar at Ephesos (Oberleitner 2009). Its reliefs were found redeployed in late antiquity out of context, but they most likely decorated the outside of a monumental altar (cf. [Figure 2.5](#); Hölscher, [Chapter 2](#), this volume). Both in form and sculptural aspiration, it was the answer of Ephesos in the second century CE to the Great Altar of Attalid Pergamon. Instead of the concentrated two- or three-figure marble pictures of the Aphrodisias Sebasteion, the Ephesos monument carried a continuous frieze divided probably into four or five major themes. It is now clear that its older interpretation as a monument to Lucius Verus and his Parthian war is without foundation, and that its concept and execution belong in the period immediately after the death of Hadrian and the accession of Antoninus Pius. This is the dynastic configuration so clearly represented in the famous adoption scene: Hadrian with Antoninus Pius attended by the young Marcus Aurelius and the boy Lucius Verus (Liverani 1995; Fuchs 2009). The date is secure independent of the monument's other iconography, and this is important, as it allows us to see clearly one of its quintessential non-Roman aspects. That is, unlike narrative historical monuments at Rome, the frieze is for the most part wholly unconcerned with any appearance of truth and reality. Although Hadrian and Antoninus Pius fought no great foreign wars, much of the monument was taken up with a long and violent battle frieze showing Romans defeating some fierce but generic northern or eastern barbarians. The frieze is about the higher truth that the emperor keeps the empire safe by constant struggle on its frontiers. The natural visual language for such heroic deeds, from the perspective of western Asia, was the dynamic epic style favored by Hellenistic rulers. In other friezes the gods are present, the regions of empire are celebrated and cared for, and finally the emperor ascends to heaven, not on an eagle as in Rome, but in a chariot accompanied by cosmic Apollo-Helios and local Artemis-Selene, each in a chariot too. In the static ceremonial adoption scene, the figures are marked as imperial by the toga, appropriate to the civil nature of the occasion. In the apotheosis, the imperial figure is signaled by the commander's cuirass. These were two "Roman" costume additives that were necessary to ensure legibility. The iconography of the monument as a whole is held together by a strong unifying Hellenistic frieze style. Hadrian's empire is recast in such a strong militarist manner that it has been unrecognizable to many modern scholars, who have expected something different from a monument to the supposed emperor of ecumenical peace.

One powerful lesson from both the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias and the Antonine altar at Ephesos is how little these Greek cities—well-connected, Rome-oriented cities—cared about central Roman perspectives and expectations of the emperor's role. The emperor was not for them a carefully negotiated super-senator with military powers, but a conquering warrior hero and Olympian savior. The same radical recasting can be seen in the great marble cult portraits that survive, for example, from Ephesos (Titus, [Figure 24.3](#); Inan and Rosenbaum 1966, no. 27), Pergamon (Trajan and Hadrian: *ibid.*, nos. 28–30), and Sardis (Antoninus Pius, Faustina the Elder, Marcus Aurelius, Lucilla, and Commodus: *ibid.*, nos. 40–41; Yegül 2010, 382–383,

fig. 12). These colossal heads from acrolithic statues achieve the astonishing feat of representing the central metropolitan portrait types in such a way that we can still easily recognize all of them, even in fragments, while at the same time infusing them with a whole layer of super-charged force and vigor—quite alien (opposite) to the intentions and purposes of the identifying types on which they are based. The Ephesos Titus is a tour de force, a soterial vision of Flavian Rome ([Figure 24.3](#)), but still recognizable as Titus.

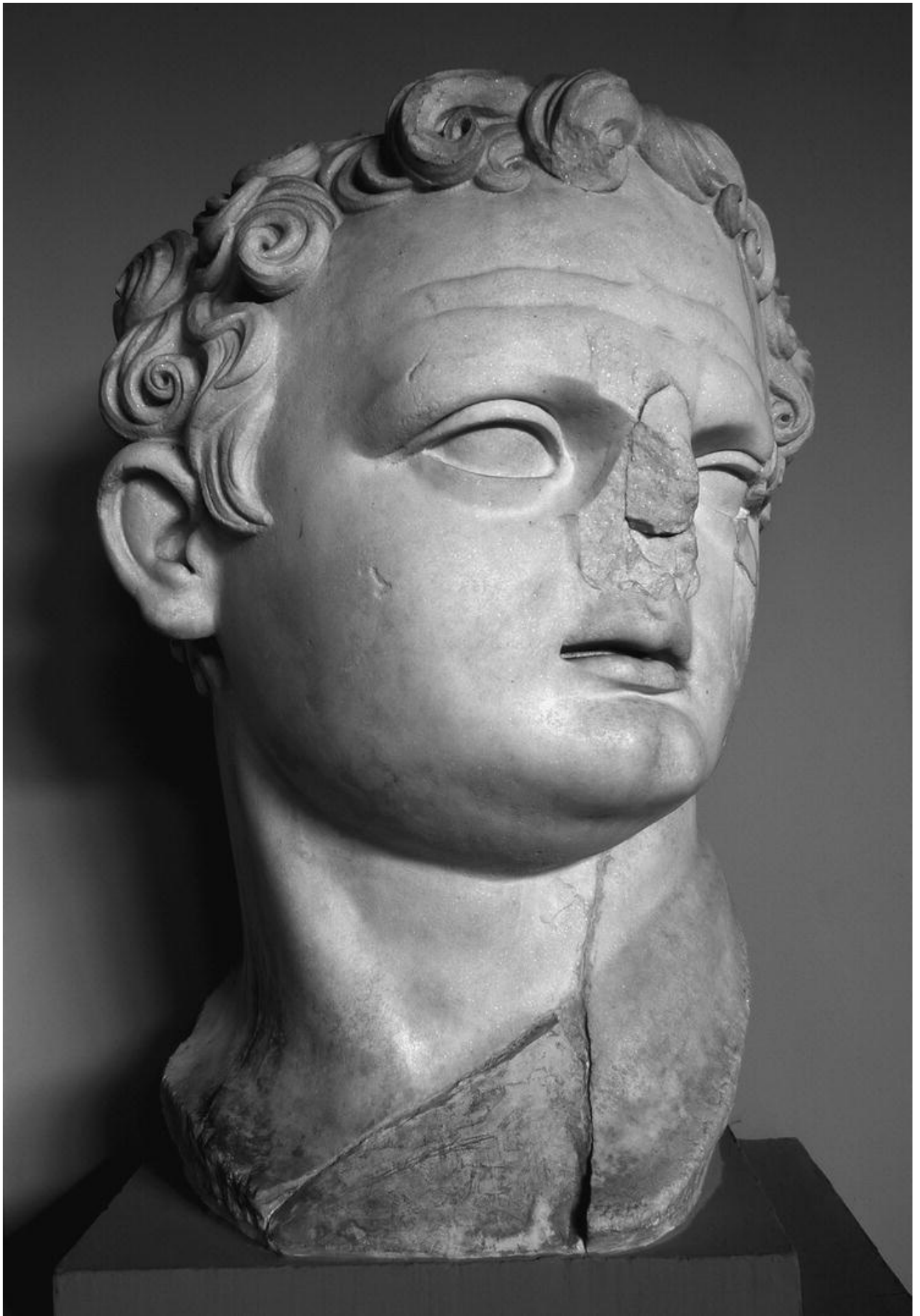


Figure 24.3 Emperor as superhuman deity. Colossal cult portrait of Titus, from imperial temple at Ephesos, late first century CE. Selcuk Museum, inv. 1/76/92.

Photo: R.R.R. Smith.

How much things changed in the realm of the emperor in the third century may be demonstrated by comparing the highly “centrist” Roman style and assumptions of such monuments as the porphyry bust of a tetrarch from Arthribis in Egypt (Delbrueck 1932, 92–94) or the friezes of Galerius’ arch at Thessalonika of circa 300 CE (Laubscher 1975; Mayer 2002, 47–65). In these monuments, the Hellenistic vision of the Roman emperor seen at Aphrodisias and Ephesos has been entirely replaced.

Realm of the Gods

Traditional local gods saw their old peripteral temples and sanctuaries maintained, refitted, perhaps equipped with new colonnades and gates (Gros 1996/2001, 160–164, 188–192). Their new temples tended to be traditional in design: peripteral and surrounded by sanctuaries with lavish four-sided colonnades, such as those featured frequently on local coins (Price and Trell 1977). Although their quantity and regularity looked to Roman models, it could be argued and felt that such temple complexes were of Hellenistic descent. Some cities created new old temples. Sardis, for example, built an unfinished and archaic-looking colossal Ionic peristasis ruin around the remodeled Hellenistic cella in the second century CE ([Figure 24.4](#); Yegül 2010). And in Thessalonika, an archaic Ionic peripteral temple was rebuilt on a Roman-period foundation (Tasia 2000). Some new temples might have Roman design aspects, such as podia and a pronounced frontal aspect, but other features that look to us Roman or imperial, such as encrusted entablatures ([Figure 24.1](#)), were probably experienced as new marble realizations of old Hellenistic ideas. In the sanctuary of Aphrodite at Aphrodisias, for example, the Hadrianic temenos with aediculated entrance wall, together with the “imperial styled” Antonine tetrapylon that marked the passage from public space to Aphrodite’s space, were designed to mark not adherence to Roman architectural values and Roman culture, but to frame and enhance a local Aphrodite configured as a tightly sheathed Anatolian fertility goddess (Brody 2007). Many cities in Greek Asia maintained or invented for themselves such old indigenous eastern cult figures for their patron deities. These were hardly anti-Hellenic, still less anti-Roman, but useful alternatives in a culture in which demonstrable antiquity was highly prized. Such figures reached back over the classical past to an earlier origin. And for cities without any such classical past (such as Aphrodisias) they were a natural recourse.



Figure 24.4 New old-style temple. Unfinished columns of porch of Temple of Artemis at Sardis. Mid-second century CE.

Photo: R.R.R. Smith.

The old “classical” gods naturally kept their divine portraits in which they had been configured and by which they had been recognized since the late classical period: Apollo, Athena, Dionysos, Herakles, Zeus. New marble versions of their defining images might be little different from classical marbles—and therefore difficult for modern archaeologists to separate from earlier versions. Others were refreshed and restyled, not so much by different or changed ideas about the character or powers of the gods represented, as by new marble techniques. The increasingly sophisticated marble technology of the second century was used to sharpen the distinctive “ideal” vision of the gods. This traditional visual conception had reserved for gods and heroes the hard, simplified, normative physiognomical forms of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, combined with plain, often highly regulated hairstyles. These set the images of the gods off from the more modulated physiognomical portrait styles of contemporary citizens. Under the Empire, the youthful “ideal” faces of the gods are made sharper and harder and combined with varied emphatic marble handlings of the old hairstyles. The museums of Turkey and modern Greece are full of such classical-looking gods and heroes made under the Empire

in a great variety of technical variations. The sheer brio effect of novel and daring carving techniques can be seen, for example, in the extraordinary Tyche of Prusa ([Figure 24.5](#); Traversari 1993), a second-century version of a Hellenistic figure that has been set alight by new techniques: new textured hair, a facial mask of shimmering ideal-divine beauty, and quivering, rustling, virtuoso drapery—rather like that of Bernini’s statues.



Figure 24.5 New marble techniques enliven divine images. Tyche from Prusias. Istanbul Archaeological Museum, inv. 4410. Second century CE.

Photo: Ahmed Ertug with kind permission.

Usually, divine images avoided confusion with portraits by using their own, more restrained techniques appropriate to their classical majesty. In the second century, however, full-haired and bearded older gods sometimes received a modernizing treatment; that is, the application of contemporary portrait techniques to old classical types. They can be given enlivening physiognomical touches that recharge the image with contemporary meaning without undermining its divine identity. Others employ Antonine marble techniques on the gods' long hair. A clear and effective example is the textured and finely drilled long hair and beard of a reclining river god from the Baths of Vedius at Ephesus (Scherrer 2000, 171). The god has the hair and beard technique of a Lucius Verus bust, but remains a river god. Roman marble techniques made the Greek gods new and alive. However, that is "Roman" only in our sense of "belonging to the Roman imperial period." Again, the new aspects that look "Roman" to us had been fully internalized as parts of contemporary representational means. The gods made new by these techniques remained wholly Greek.

Realm of the Citizen

Inside the cities, between housing areas and the sanctuaries of the gods, public space was reserved for the accommodation and *mise-en-scène* of political culture and citizen life. Buildings, monuments, and statues were deployed to represent the huge importance allotted to this sphere of life. Viewed without the contemporary concepts and historical context given by written texts, much of these archaeological remains might seem both new and Roman. Much was indeed new. Systematic axial planning, vaulted bath buildings, columnar façades, terraced and substructured buildings, civic complexes separated and closed in—they were all in a sense "Roman:" they flourished in a culture that had absorbed many of Rome's most effective architectural ideas, especially those that expressed the dignity of a city and the authority of its leading citizens. It might be said that much had grown out of Hellenistic ideas and practice that were merely concretized in marble under the Empire, but this would be special pleading. There was here a real Roman effect and contribution. Intention, experience, and contemporary meaning were, however, differently oriented.

The political culture of Greek cities under the Empire contained a central paradox, and it was the role of buildings and statues to make this paradox seem logical, natural. Rome everywhere supported the conditions that produced local oligarchies, and Greek cities under the Empire were controlled by a relatively small number of families, an aristocracy of landed wealth, which, like the curial class in the west, exercised power through the offices of the council and their power of benefaction. At the same time, however, unlike the west, the public language and ideology of political life were calibrated to those of late classical and Hellenistic democracy. The words, terminology, and processes of demos-oriented politics were taken seriously. Public buildings carried monumental inscribed dedications to the local god, the

emperor, and the demos. Such buildings are declared to be for the people. Public decrees may have been decided by the council and merely ratified by the people's assembly, but those assemblies continued to meet, and its decrees and awards of honors are declared to be decrees of the *boulē* and the demos. The political culture was represented in a mass of inscribed public writing as though in fourth-century Athens. The accommodation of this curious idea shaped much of what kept the cities still looking and feeling Greek. Indeed, the prominence of so strange (untrue) a self-conception may be partly explained by that advanced archaism of thought that characterizes the cities under the Empire: the desire to think, write, look, and be like people of an earlier Hellenic golden age.

Many cities had by the first century CE a good or adequate Hellenistic urban appearance and had little room, need, or money for new building. Priene, for example, a product of Hellenistic urbanism of the third to second centuries BCE (Rumscheid and Koenigs 1998, 21–22), would have looked in the second century CE perhaps as a prosperous Cotswold market town looks in England today: a quaint, 200-year-old townscape with a few modern additions. The urban fabric of many cities was frozen, by desire as much as by need, in a now distant past. The difference between these Hellenistic old towns and the new or overbuilt cities of Asia cannot be calibrated by Roman components. New buildings took some things from Rome, avoided others, and refocused what they did take. Mostly they aimed to work within and out of Hellenistic traditions.

Long stoas and colonnades defined the urban space reserved for the citizen demos—for their leisure, strolling, and business. Free-standing stoas persisted, as did the Doric order (Ismaelli 2009). The Neronian stoa at Ephesos is a grand example of both of these features (Scherrer 2000, 142). Some theaters employed the superior semi-circular Roman design, and some raised the auditorium on vaulted substructures—both, for example, at Miletos (Sear 2006, 105–115). The majority continued to be built against a hill and to extend in a horseshoe plan well beyond the rational semi-circle (the arc of the Sagalassos theater extends to an arc of not less than 256 degrees; Sear 2006, 374). These were key elements of old Greek theater design and may have been felt to represent the important traditional aspect of a theater as the place of demos assembly. Here the people met in a neatly ordered and theorized representation of their tribal structure, which was often inscribed on the seating. The columnar scaenae, so much part of Roman display architecture and a *sine qua non* in Greek theaters under the Empire, may have owed their ubiquity to Roman practice, but they were quickly common stock and clearly derived from Hellenistic ideas (an early example at Aphrodisias is dated in the 20s BCE: Theodorescu 1996). Priority and contemporary resonance could hardly have been taken as “Roman.” Set beside their new-style scaenae, persistent unwieldy old-style horseshoe plans for auditoria were another form of willful archaism.

Many new stadia were built, both as an investment to attract visitors from elsewhere to spend money at festivals and to provide a defined architectural home for the community's games. There can be a profusion of casual writing on the seating (Roueché 1993). The demos sat here in a different, more casual configuration from that of the politically ordered theater. Place names on the seats mapped a complex, decentered social topography of guilds, groups, individuals, and outsiders. Stadium architecture was also ostentatiously plain: vernacular

supports on the outer sides, plain undifferentiated stone seating within, with only a slight articulation of the central seats for the judges and the givers of the games. A few stadia in the Meander and Lycus valleys (Aphrodisias, Laodikeia) had stylish double ends that were perhaps inspired by enclosed Roman amphitheaters (Welch 1998). Traditionally, stadia were for Greek athletic games and festivals, but, like theaters, they could also accommodate the Roman games associated with imperial-cult festivals. The latter were important and were clearly marked Roman or imperial, but the contrast with the west was powerful. There, the Roman games received a new Roman building form, the amphitheater. Eastern cities as a rule chose not to build amphitheaters. Stadia marked the cultural priority of Hellenic festivals and games.

The best citizens were members of the council that sat in the *bouleuterion*, or council house. The prestige and sharply contoured profile given to the institution of the *boulē* was already marked in the council houses of leading Hellenistic cities, for example at Priene and Miletus. These small, covered, highly designed theaters continued to be built in the imperial period, now with columnar scaena façades, as for example at Nysa, Ephesos, Stratonikeia, and Aphrodisias ([Figure 24.6](#); Gros 1996/2001, 313–316). The interior elaboration of imperial-period council houses represented the elevated dignity of the *boulē*. If the demos, meeting in the theater, was the heart and body of the community, the *boulē* meeting in its council house was its head. Lavish bouleuterion interiors framed the authority of the leading citizens and provided the proper setting for their well-composed speeches of wise counsel for the common good. Statues of the greatest members of the great families might stand at or in the council house, as, for example, at Aphrodisias (Smith 2006, 60–65).

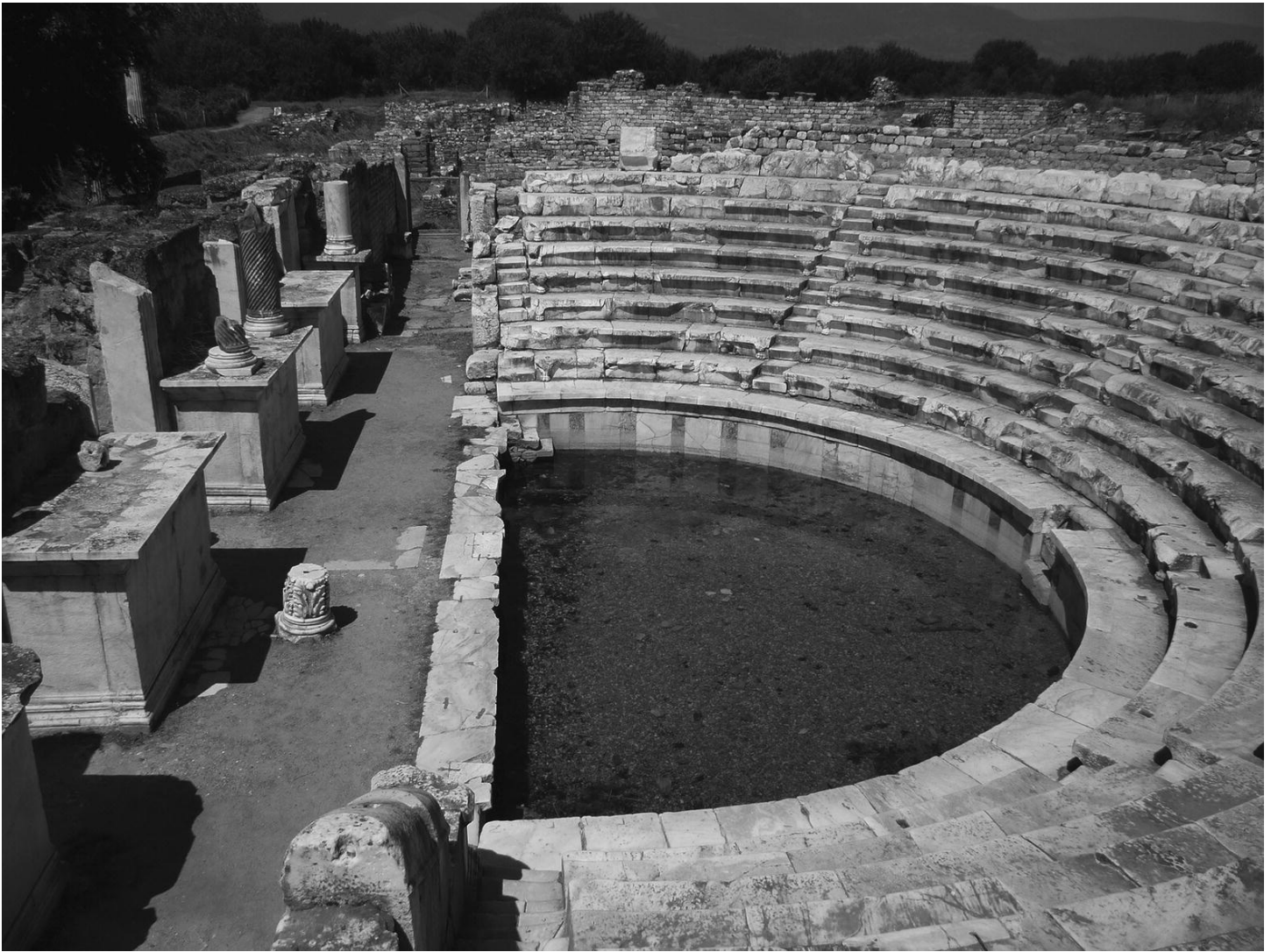


Figure 24.6 Interior splendour for the city council. Bouleuterion at Aphrodisias. Later second century CE.

Photo: R.R.R. Smith.

The needs of public and political representation in buildings were mostly met by traditional building forms (stoa, theater, bouleuterion). Adaptations of the Roman basilica offered something more. The Roman basilica, enclosing an often sumptuous interior space, carried in its name and its effect unspecified Hellenistic royal associations, but in its developed form it was as Roman as podium temples or brick-faced concrete vaults. The basilica idea was imported to the Greek east, but was carefully adapted in “Hellenic” or local ways (Gros 1996, 245–248). The Augustan example at Ephesus had three aisles, but was open all down its long side facing the upper agora. This self-conscious assimilation of basilica and stoa was encapsulated in its inscribed designation restored as *basilikē stoa* (Scherrer 2000, 80). Later examples were fully enclosed (Aphrodisias, Aspendos, Smyrna), but maintained substantial differences from Roman basilicas, most notably in their stoa-like length and their imposing terminal chambers (Stinson 2008). In what sense these basilicas were “needed” is debatable. Probably they housed courts, administrative offices, and high-end business offices.

Large bath complexes in Greek cities might seem obviously Roman. Indeed, the perfected

technological know-how of water supply and bath heating, as well as their high cultural valuation, were learned in Rome. As the emperor provided bathing palaces for his people's health and pleasure, so would Asia's citizen grandee for his demos—but with some differences. The great Roman *thermae* evolved ultimately from the idea of bathing and exercise in the Hellenistic gymnasium, with the emphasis heavily on the bathing part. The baths of the Greek east purported to bring back the gymnasium part (although Roman baths, it should be said, already catered to this aspect fully), and this priority could be signaled by the designation “gymnasion” to cover a whole Greek bathing complex of the imperial period (Yegül 1992, ch. 7). In truth, with their skillful conjunction of cavernous vaulted bathing chambers and grand open colonnaded palaestra courts, the Greek bath–gymnasia were local variants of directly received Roman ideas. Bathing architecture was something that imperial Rome simply did better.

The theater, bouleuterion, and public squares, and eventually the baths, were favored locales for the many honorific statues set up in Greek cities under the Empire (Smith 2006, ch. 2). The statues congregated at places of the greatest public prestige and honored the benefactors and participating grandees who controlled the cities and paid for the elaborately constructed urban scenery described earlier. Paying for embassies, festivals, and buildings and receiving public honors in return were the very stuff of city politics under the Empire. The personal portrait statue on its inscribed base was the highest-valued currency of this political transaction, and nowhere was the fundamentally Hellenic character of Greek city culture, with its occasional, carefully selected Roman additives, more variously negotiated or more thoroughly affirmed. Since portrait statues were direct representations of personal identity, they were sensitive barometers of cultural choices.

Statue honors for the emperor and his family were in the minority and tended to be placed in different places from those of local citizens (in Sebasteia, for example, as at Boubon: Kokkinia 2008). The two-storied fountain building of Herodes Atticus at Olympia was unusual in its combined presentation of the Antonine imperial family and Herodes' family (Bol 1984). Of the available statue costumes for local benefactors, the himation was by far the most common, worn with a chiton in a variety of schemes and postures that went back virtually unchanged to the early Hellenistic period. The himation carried a broad, still accumulating meaning, after three or four centuries, of Greek polis citizen, and referred to his public life inside the city. The himation was the costume for the stoa, bouleuterion, and theater. Philosophers and some others might wear the himation ostentatiously without the chiton beneath, in the manner of classical citizens and Hellenistic thinkers. This was now an archaism acted out in life and in statuary—although, tellingly, it is found more often in bust form than in full statues.

It is remarkable that members of the Greek city elite who had Roman citizenship still preferred the himation and chiton suit. They had double citizenship—for example, of Oinoanda and of Rome—and the himation marked this local citizenship as primary in their hometowns. Their inscribed Greek-Roman names, such as C. Julius Demosthenes, were enough to mark their Roman citizen status. Even after Caracalla's edict of 212 that gave Roman citizenship to all free members of the Empire, the new Marcus Aurelius citizens of Greek cities still preferred to represent themselves in the himation (Smith 2008). From the early Empire, the toga was

familiar and available to represent Roman citizenship for those who had it, just as the amphitheater building form was available for Roman games (Havé-Nikolaus 1998). The toga costume, however, was never a common choice. It seems to have been used frequently only for restricted groups: for Greek-Roman citizens in the early Empire when possession of the extra Roman citizenship was still rare in the Greek east, and for younger members of elite families who did not yet have a local public curriculum vitae of their own. For them, the toga and Roman citizenship were a powerful display choice within the economy of honorific statues.

Statues of women were a prominent part of the honorific landscape of Greek cities: wives and daughters, as priestesses and benefactresses, often together with their husbands or close male relatives (van Bremen 1996). Their statue costumes were a difficult-to-grasp combination of real clothes (foot-length dresses with large shawls over them) and costumes derived from figures of the Hellenistic period that were later taken as normative. Among the most common are the Ceres type, a range of Pudicitia types, and the so-called Large and Small Herculaneum types (Daehner 2007). There was no recognizably “Roman” female citizen costume, and these dress choices carried a range of traditional meanings about the desirable, elegant, well-groomed woman. Their portrait heads might have either traditional, unindividualized features and Hellenistic hairstyles, or physiognomical portrait features with metropolitan fashion hairstyles. The precise reception of metropolitan female hairstyles might seem to us obviously “Roman.” Rome was indeed their point of origin, but their purpose was less political-cultural affiliation than a means of showing participation in an Empire-wide culture of fashion and female elegance. The swift take-up of precisely the latest women’s hairstyles around the Empire (although not by all and not everywhere) is for us a remarkable index of the Empire’s intense interconnectedness.

Portraits of men employ a wide range of styles and cultural postures (Smith 1998). From at least the mid-second century most have elements of Roman portrait technology, such as drilled eyes and hair, which however carried no “Roman” charge. They served a primary function of enlivening and marking such sculptures as contemporary portraits. A few contrasting portrait choices may be mentioned. A lined, older, clean-shaven portrait style might look to us “Roman,” and indeed such styles were employed in sharpened form in Italy as a marker of Roman values. They had also been a familiar choice, however, in the Greek east in the first centuries BCE and CE, and in the second century CE signified rather a range of conservative moral values. A wide range of portraits wore metropolitan hairstyles, less as a gesture of affiliation than as contemporary fashion. Imitating imperial portraits (the so-called period face) was simply the most effective way of achieving a fashionable result. Certainly from the mid-second century, Antonine hairstyles on Greek portraits signified not a longing for Rome, but participation in the whole new culture of personal male styling.

Particularly prominent in Athens and mainland Greece, but also found in the cities of Asia, was a range of distinctively “Hellenic” portrait options that employed plain hairstyles and thick moustaches and beard forms derived from the fourth and third centuries BCE. Only their marble technique is contemporary. The meaning of this “Hellenic” posture can be seen clearly in documented cases in which it was used to represent such self-styled guardians of Hellenic purity as Herodes Atticus ([Figure 24.7](#)) and the Athenian *kosmetai*, the headmasters of the

Athens gymnasium (Lattanzi 1968; Borg 2004; Krumreich 2004). These portraits testify again to a lived archaism: the fourth and third centuries BCE live on or have been reborn, brought back to vigorous life in these Hellenic fundamentalists of the second century CE. Their portraits reach back, over 300 years, to a longed-for golden age both of Hellenic writing and thinking and of pre-Macedonian (and *a fortiori* pre-Roman) Greek city culture. This posture, of course, involved no impossible denial of Rome. They signaled instead intensely local and regional cultural priorities. Rome was present in useful additives to one's civic portfolio, such as a priesthood of the emperors, a position in the senate, or Roman citizenship displayed proudly in one's names. In the tight economy of statues, it was usually enough to signal such explicit Roman additives on the inscribed bases.

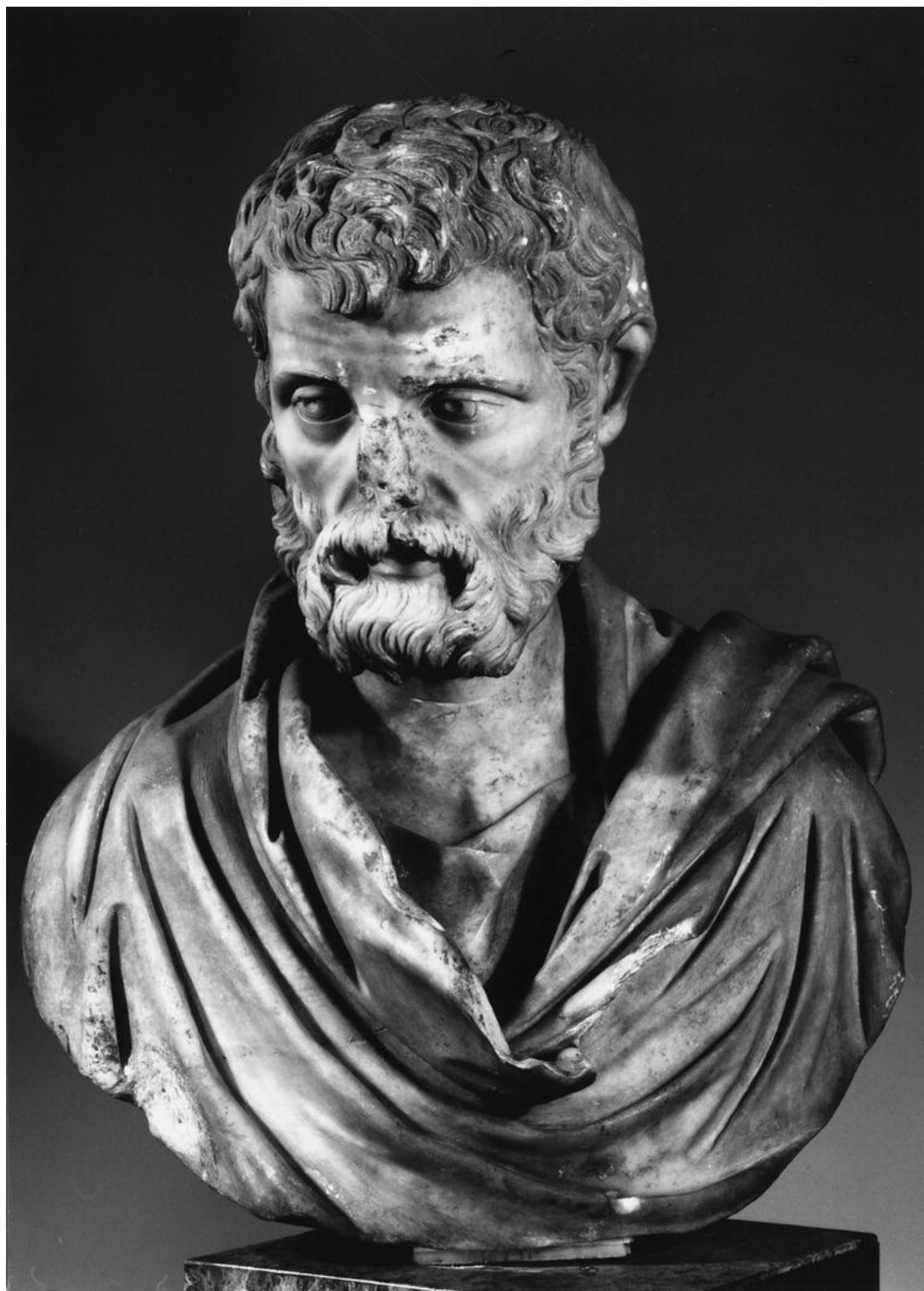


Figure 24.7 Old-style Hellene with new-style marble technique. Himation bust of Herodes Atticus, from Probalinthos. Mid-second century. Paris, Louvre, inv. Ma 1164.

Photo: Alphanion/Wikimedia Commons.

Hellenic and alternative choices in public and religious monuments should not be misunderstood as what is now sometimes diagnosed as “resistance” to Rome. Naturally, not everyone was happy under Rome, and there were certainly groups opposed to the Empire, but it is unlikely that any surviving images or monuments embodied expressions of such opposition. Resistance was not really within the competence of permanent, carved monuments. They were, for better or for worse, products of collective assent, for the most part set up by and expressing interests of local elites who, in a fundamental and recognized sense, owed their positions to Rome. Their alternative Hellenic and local choices may seem to conflict with modern ideas of proper “collaboration” or “assimilation.” It is, however, the modern expectation that is misplaced. They were choices that responded to local needs. One could think (a weaker “resistance” claim) that such choices made by local elites were shaped precisely in order to avoid forcing a stridently Roman vision of things on their contemporaries, to provide a comforting illusion of independence to their possibly disgruntled, lower-status fellow citizens. This too springs from mainly modern and misplaced expectations in the use of monuments. The Hellenic and local shaping of art in the Roman east was probably due more to evolving local tradition and to a calculus of what was most effective; that is, what was both most comprehensible and most connected to the ideas and experiences shared by its intended viewers. Our surviving monuments were concerned with prevailing norms, and, whether they were imposed, reluctantly accepted, or warmly embraced, it was not really their sphere of competence to cater to dissenting voices.

Realm of the Dead

The realm of the dead lay outside the city and, for a few, very special dead, inside. Tombs and burials stretched along and behind the main roads leading in and out of towns. They were not disposed in clearly defined, delimited zones like modern cemeteries, but grew out of loose concentrations of competitive display. Funerary monuments are an extension of the realm of the citizen, and there are many themes and ideas in common between the art of the two realms. Tomb art, however, is different in its wider social range, in its family orientation, in its sharply defined localisms, and in its astonishing abundance and variety (von Hesberg 1992). Here many other citizens get to speak and they often say things that are different. We find here a range of local and regional ideas and monument forms that go far beyond Greek and Roman. We may pick out some themes and significant cases.

In the first centuries BCE and CE, the Greek east was still predominantly a stele culture, with graves marked by independent inscribed relief slabs whose scale was controlled by strong collective norms. The reliefs survive in large quantities (Pfuhl and Möbius 1977/1979). Two strands may be mentioned. First, most prominent in Asia there was a strong, unbroken continuity of stele form and family iconography from the second century BCE into at least the

first century CE. Those dated in the imperial period are recognized primarily by their inscriptions. Second, most prominent in Greece and especially Athens, there was a reaching back to classical gravestones in form and style, achieved either by new commissions in this manner (von Moock 1998) or by reusing old stelai from the large numbers still available now after four centuries that had lost connection to owning families (Schmaltz 2001). In the cities of western Asia, the stelai evoked the vibrant Hellenistic heyday of the second century BCE. In Athens, stele buyers were still living in the age of Demosthenes.

Sarcophagus burial was already gaining momentum in the first century CE, again in unbroken continuity from Hellenistic models (Koch and Sichtermann 1982, chs. 4–5). The early chests in marble or available local stone were decorated predominantly with the garland swags of civic and religious celebration. In the second century CE, the top end of the eastern sarcophagus market was supplied by two great marble-exporting centers, Athens and Dokimeion. Roman sarcophagi were available, but rarely imported. The Athenian sarcophagi were shipped all over the eastern Mediterranean and were carved typically with expensive carved moldings and dense heroic friezes (Giuliano 1962). These friezes drew on classical action compositions that were brilliantly reformatted into compact walls of high-relief figures fitted to the dimensions of each sarcophagus chest ([Figure 24.8](#)). The Athenians again defeat the Amazons, or again drive the Persians into the sea at Marathon (Ewald 2004). The old stories are relived as vital and present, as a means of comparison with today, as symbols of aspirational virtue.



Figure 24.8 Struggle of heroes of old. Greeks fight Trojans at ships. Attic sarcophagus. Thessaloniki Archaeological Museum, inv. 1246. Early third century.

Photo: R.R.R. Smith.

The grandest Dokimeion sarcophagi had columned chests, elaborately carved with aedicular architecture framing tall, mannered statue figures of the owner, his entourage, and his ideal family (Wiegartz 1965; Waelkens 1982). Here was ample opportunity for a range of roles and identities to be featured. Wives, daughters, thinker-writers, citizen-orators, baby children, and officiating priests and priestesses are all present, as though on honorific parade in columned public architecture. Roman identity is mainly confined to simple inscriptions. The sarcophagi were exported at huge expense, mainly to cities in the Anatolian peninsula, many of which had their own flourishing local sarcophagus production available close by—from Bithynian Nicea to Syrian Antioch, with surviving concentrations, for example, at Perge and Ikonion (Konya). The inscriptions, their scale and elaboration, and their thin geographical spread in Asia show that the Dokimeion columnar sarcophagi were the preferred burial form for the very top of the landed provincial elite: senatorial and proconsular families well connected at Rome. Production of these and local sarcophagi rose sharply in the early third century and stopped soon after the middle of the third century.

Some tombs made a more explicit negotiation of their owners' Roman identities. The tomb frieze of C. Julius Zoilos (20s BCE) at Aphrodisias represented the great man, a freedman of Augustus, in several guises and roles—in a himation, in a traveling chlamys, and in a Roman toga—held together in a unified classical style and an elevated allegorical narrative (Smith 1994). The frieze even included a stately figure of Roma herself. The tomb and library built for Tiberius Julius Celsus Polemaeanus at Ephesos (c. 110–120 CE) showed this proconsular grandee in a variety of roles, including one in the costume of a Roman commander ([Figure 24.9](#); Wilberg et al. 1953; Stroocka 2006). Besides statues personifying his traditional Hellenic virtues (Wisdom, Knowledge, Moral Excellence), there were also equestrian statues on which are inscribed his curriculum vitae in Roman service in both Latin and meticulous Greek translation. Twelve Roman fasces symbolizing his consular rank are even worked into the classical scroll frames of the library's doors. Such even-handed Greek–Roman combinations were unusual. The contemporary monument in Athens for C. Julius Antiochos Epiphanes Philopappos (died 116 CE), grandson of the last king of Commagene, went further (Kleiner 1983). The monument's images and inscriptions bring out with thought and care the three main aspects of his multiple identity: as North Syrian royalty, as Athenian office holder, and as Roman consular. In the façade of the tomb, statues of Seleukos Nikator and of his grandfather Antiochos IV addressed his royal connections. They framed Philopappos' own statue, which wore a himation and sandals that represented his Hellenic–Athenian identity. Below the statues, a large frieze describes his role as a Roman consul accompanied by lictors. The bilingual inscriptions are revealing. They list his Roman curriculum vitae in Latin, his royal and Athenian offices in Greek. The subject of each inscription is suited to the language used and to a presumed audience. These three unusual monuments at Aphrodisias, Ephesus, and Athens were from the apex of provincial society under the Empire and sat at the epicenter of the tightly negotiated relationship of Hellenic culture and Roman power.



Figure 24.9 Greek culture and Roman power. Library and tomb of Ti. Julius Celsus Polemaeanus at Ephesos, c. 110–120 CE.

After: W. Wilberg, M. Theuer, F. Eichler, J. Keil, *Die Bibliothek* (Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Vienna, 1953), pl. 1.

Three discrete strands of broader funerary culture can illustrate the range of non-Greek local cultures that flourished in the eastern Empire. Prosperous Phrygian farmers in inland Anatolia have left a large quantity of distinctive stelai with strong, unclassical frontal renderings of self and family labeled in articulate Greek inscriptions (Lochman 2003). They were generated within a closed, inward-looking rural area for a local audience. In Egypt, local Greek elites commissioned Egyptian-style mummies for their loved ones, but with highly effective, illusionistic classical portraits placed over the head ([Figures 12.3](#) and [17.11](#); cf. Borg 1996). These mummies negotiate between a sharp personal identity and the powerful time-honored rituals of Egyptian mortuary practice. The portraits make free use of the latest metropolitan

Roman hairstyles and postures, again to define membership of the best fashionable society. The Egyptian and classical parts of this funerary culture employed their own visual codes—seen best, perhaps, in the great shroud pictures of full-figure himation citizens conducted to the next world by Egyptian-style deities (Riggs 2005). Just as Philopappos’ inscriptions say Roman things in Latin, royal and Athenian things in Greek, so for these images the style of the figures was an integral part of their meaning. This art is not Greco-Egyptian but Greek and Egyptian, side by side.

Out in the Syrian desert, the wealthy caravan traders of Palmyra commissioned lavish multistoried tower tombs containing sarcophagi and burial slots closed by relief slabs bearing portrait busts (Colledge 1976). The portraits and the narrative scenes play on Hellenic, local, and occasionally Roman identities. The abundant female portrait busts have a sharp, locally generated style and wear astonishing displays of jewelry and headgear quite alien to the ideological austerities of Greek city culture. One sarcophagus is highly revealing in this context ([Figure 24.10](#); Schmidt-Colinet 1997, 164–165). On the chest, the central figure, doubtless the sarcophagus owner, wears a toga and conducts a sacrifice, while on top of the sarcophagus he reclines in his “true” local identity as Palmyrene grandee wearing a heavily decorated Syrian trouser suit—the costume of a desert rider. He was a Roman citizen and a local caravan knight. It is interesting that he sacrifices without the toga pulled over his head, as custom in Rome demanded: he is a Roman citizen carrying out a sacrifice at home. The local stone-cutting style unifies these monuments with a single, immediately recognizable style: as indelibly “Palmyrene” as the language of the tomb inscriptions. The realm of the dead displayed intense localism and the widest variety of available choices.



Figure 24.10 Palmyrene and Roman identities. Sarcophagus. Early third century CE. Palmyra Museum, inv. 2677B/8983.

Photo: R.R.R. Smith.

Conclusions

What was the role of art in the cultural zones discussed in this chapter? Art is of course a serious misnomer for the huge category of symbolic mediation in visual and monumental form undertaken in the public and religious spheres of ancient cities—in its quantity, importance, and role in shaping much of the character and experience of city life. The modern world does indeed have a comparable range of visual media and expressive forms (posters, billboards, films, electronic media, and the like), but they are not categorized or studied primarily as “art,” which in the modern imagination occupies a different cultural zone. Ancient art was a much bigger, more varied, more deeply embedded phenomenon than its modern counterpart. Certainly, what is defined and studied as ancient art in modern scholarly discourse is something that intersects with but is fundamentally different from what is studied in the modern history of post-antique art. It follows that “ancient art” is a major and vital constituent of the ancient historical record. Rituals, processions, and transient spectacles of city life can be

described from texts, but they are gone, and their descriptions are without color, shape, and texture—and often without that vital constituent of distinctive cultural specificity that is the peculiar province of images and monuments. The reliefs from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias ([Figure 24.2](#)) or the portraits of Herodes Atticus ([Figure 24.7](#)), for example, are monuments of their time and place alone. Art, visual culture, and particular categories of figured artifacts define whole periods and zones of cultural experience, and they define them in a way that is both sharp and difficult to pin down.

This chapter has described a paradox: the architectural and visual culture of the Greek east was permeated by good Roman ideas, technologies, and designs, but mostly they were not marked as “Roman,” so were open to mental and physical reconfiguration. They were put to work for real local purposes and so became “Hellenic” or at least culturally neutral. This interesting form of cultural selection and reformulation was perhaps connected with another cultural paradox that lay at the heart of Greek city culture: the massive representation of democratic values by an aristocratic oligarchy of landed wealth. (Similar political hypocrisy is of course familiar in the modern world.) The appearance of a traditional, demos-oriented political culture was put on display in the built fabric and public writing of the city as a magnificent façade built in front of the realities of an ultimately Rome-backed plutocracy. We may see this elaborate construction as hypocritical or head-in-the-sand face saving, but for contemporaries, after a century of internalizing the new Empire and of renovating their urban profiles, it seemed natural and without contradiction.

The most obviously Roman components of material and visual production, the architecture and images made to honor and worship the emperors, were among the most vigorously reconfigured. Imperial-cult temples might have Roman designs or traditional Greek designs, but the emperor’s person was recast in images, usually with a Hellenistic-style overlay that turned him into something local and familiar. The realm of the old gods—their temples and cult figures—remained Greek, with some local, unclassical, and eastern divinities added. Occasionally some images of the gods borrowed new marble techniques pioneered in Rome, but without compromising their identities in any way.

The citizen realm—public space, civic architecture, and honorific statuary—was intensely Hellenic in posture. This was the world of the stoa and the himation, both long-standing representations of demos-oriented political culture. Some clear imported Roman ideas—such as older “Trajanic”-looking portraits and heavily carved aedicular architecture—turned out in their local contexts to be little concerned with their Romanness. The possession of Roman citizenship or prized membership of the Roman senate were obviously worth declaring as telling additions in inscribed texts, but were not often worthy of representation in statues. The realm of the dead and its variety of tomb monuments (stelai, sarcophagi, friezes) offered great opportunity for the representation of multiple social and political identities. The widespread Roman citizenship, however, was rarely chosen as a valuable and effective theme. On elite sarcophagi, the emphasis was primarily on the heroes of classical Greece, or on civic and family roles and the values of the gymnasium, of education and *paideia*. Non-Greek and unclassical forms abound in the eastern provinces: Phrygian stelai, Fayum mummies, Palmyrene loculus reliefs. Their points of reference are local, Hellenic, Egyptian, and Syrian.

The normative backdrop of Greek city culture was its prestigious past. Explicit Roman components were useful in some contexts. It was obvious to all that this was a Roman world: Roman armies, emperors, taxes, governors, coins, instructions, and games were established facts of life. This was not, however, a political system that was interested in cultural imperialism, and there was therefore no need or thought given either by Rome to enforcing any kind of uniformity, or by the cities to deliberately mediating an expected Roman view of things. The Roman fundamentals of political life and of new (Roman) art technologies were firmly in place, leaving cities free to recreate a new Greek present for themselves, based on models of the past and on many good new ideas of the present that seemed for the most part culturally neutral.

It is important to remember that the main forms and styles of architectural and visual culture described here were all matters of choice, that none was the result of any grand imperatives of tradition or cultural development that led inexorably to what we have before us. They could all at any point have been different. The cities, their grandees, and their urban middle classes might have chosen to represent their affiliation to the Roman Empire through small amphitheaters in every city, through many, many more imperial busts and statues, through the regular wearing of the toga in statues and on sarcophagi by all who had been granted Roman citizenship, through more bilingual Greek–Latin translations of their inscriptions, through consistently Roman-style podium temples reserved for the worship of the imperial family, through the conversion of agoras into forum–basilica complexes. Such things would have been perfectly explicable; we might even have said that they were predictable; and they would of course have told us huge amounts about the character of the Roman Empire. Yet none of these things happened. Other choices were made, based on deep premises that may seem obvious but are worth articulating: the Roman state controlled the basic political trajectory of the Greek cities, but had no interest in imposing on them any kind of cultural values whatsoever. The city grandees embraced the Empire and the position of local power that it gave them, and added a few elements of explicit Roman color to their main preference for a Hellenic cultural posture of some four centuries earlier. These choices, however, were now enacted on a scale, in a quantity, and with a technology that were made possible by Roman circumstances. Some of their designs and particular effects—usually those of power, authority, and majesty—were also borrowed, in a deniable manner, directly from the art and buildings of the imperial center.

Huge spending on carved stone images, monuments, and display buildings was accompanied in Greek cities under Rome by impressive amounts of public writing that framed the reception of these monuments to contemporaries (and for us) and described the whole conceptual framework of city life: that of Hellenic culture, Olympian gods, and imperial power diffused through local *philo-kaisar* leaders. It is the public writing attached directly to the monuments that in the first instance should shape and limit their interpretation. While current deficits and possible future directions of this area of study are of course manifold, one future direction might be in finding a proper integrative model that can bring together the buildings, images, public writing, and literary texts (for example, speeches from the same public and religious contexts as the monuments). The quantities of material and access charges of the subdisciplines involved make it difficult, but a more sophisticated narrative and connective model would be

welcome.

Another useful axis of inquiry might concern the aspects of craft and specific aesthetic effects that have not really been brought into play and made to work within the wider interpretive historical discourse. Alongside buyers and viewers, sometimes vague, undefined, undefended categories—such as style, development, influence, artistic agency—still operate as autonomous givens, as if their role, force, and explanatory power were self-evident and unproblematic. All of these might be useful concepts, but only if defined and put in historical contexts and in a wider theoretical calculus that allows proper place to the many other aspects operational in and around any given figured artifact—such as the craft, material, and workshop aspects that operate with and beside human agents such as viewers, buyers, designers, and makers.

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

The only synthetic accounts of art and architecture in the Greek east under Rome are Vermeule (1968), which is full but often inaccurate, and Hanfmann (1975), which is brief. For urbanism and architecture, Gros (1996/2001) is indispensable, with the Greek east set in the context of Rome and the rest of the Empire; Thomas (2007) also has much of interest for second-century monuments and architecture. The main bodies of surviving material (statues, stelai, friezes, sarcophagi) can be found in the high-quality catalogues and monographs referred to in the text. For many questions discussed here, especially in the realm of the gods and that of the citizen, there is much of lasting value in the specialized papers in Borg (2004a). Important historical works provide setting and a text-based counterpoint to the monuments and images. For the zone of the emperor, Price (1984) remains fundamental. For political structures of the cities, Millar (1993) is a masterly account. For the cities, their gods, and inscribed monuments, Mitchell (1993) is a rich and compelling synthesis of all facets of the cultural life of inner Anatolia. For a thoughtful understanding of Greek and Roman cultural-political negotiation, Woolf (1994) remains stimulating. For the prominent role of women in the visual and inscribed record, van Bremen (1996) is essential. Although entirely innocent of visual and monumental evidence, Zuiderhoek (2009) has a provocative central thesis on the political role of euergetism in Roman Asia.

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CHAPTER 25

The Western Roman Provinces

Roger J.A. Wilson

To attempt to summarize, in only a handful of pages, the visual culture of the western provinces under Rome (“Roman art” in this context is a misleading and inappropriate label) is a challenge. Its restless vitality and wide diversity, which make generalizations hazardous, are best characterized by a regional approach: the focus here is on items that most clearly define an area’s artistic identity and distinctiveness. The degree of dependence on Italian (and other foreign) models varied enormously, and further factors that shaped artistic output included the indigenous heritage on the one hand, and a carefree delight in experimentation and novelty on the other. Multilayered and bewilderingly heterogeneous in character, the visual culture of the western Roman provinces is also endlessly fascinating.

The African Provinces

Phoenicians from the late ninth century BCE onwards founded Carthage and other *emporia* along the North African littoral, later to fall under the sway of Carthage’s growing empire, which at its height in the third and early second centuries BCE embraced large parts of what is now Tunisia. Urbanism and a rich if eclectic artistic culture were well established here by the time of the fall of Carthage to Rome in 146 BCE. Outside areas of direct Carthaginian control, urban nuclei made less headway before the Roman conquest, although the ruling elite of the Numidians, the indigenous peoples of Algeria and western Tunisia, became settled in scattered proto-urban centers (some boasting impressive mausolea) in the course of the third and second centuries BCE. It is only, however, from the Augustan reorganization of the African provinces in the later first century BCE that the artistic output of North Africa under Roman hegemony comes into sharper focus (Brouillet 1994; Slim 2001; Lancel 2003; Sintès and Rebahi 2003; Sintès 2010; Baratte 2012).

Sculpture

Two main strands define the sculpture of Roman North Africa, one fully in the mainstream of the classical tradition, the other not (Romanelli 1970, 289–313; Picard 1982). A huge amount of sculpture, especially in white (imported) marble and in the round, is highly competent work that demonstrates the accomplished levels achieved by many local workshops in different African towns (e.g., at Cherchel: Landwehr 1993/2008), as well as the refined tastes of the elite of Romano-African society. At the beginning of the Empire, itinerant sculptors from Italy and elsewhere executed the marble portraits of local benefactors and the like, and later, too, they came back for special commissions such as Septimius Severus’ large-scale building projects at his birthplace, Lepcis Magna, where the work of sculptors from Attica and probably also Asia Minor is attested (Ward-Perkins 1993, 99). However, African craftsmen in

the course of the first century CE soon began to cater to demand. The artists responsible are almost all anonymous. Few bothered to sign their work, exceptions being T. Cornelius Saturninus at Carthage, L. Plotius Clemens at Hippo Regius (eastern Algeria), and Muri(sius?), whose workshop was probably based at Cherchel (near Algiers); but we know nothing else about them (Leschi 1952, 19; Walda 1985, 49).

In time, such local workshops developed characteristics and idiosyncrasies of their own. The portrait of a grim-faced, toga-clad citizen of Dougga, with “designer-stubble” beard, shows full awareness of Greco-Roman iconography in having a turreted crown on his head, a standard symbol of municipal fortune. Yet the crown is normally worn only by deities, (in the case of a male) by the *genius* or guiding spirit of a town: here the benefactor himself, by self-consciously appropriating an iconographical label, is proudly proclaiming himself as the very personification of Dougga’s prosperity (Cacan de Bissy and Petit 1982, no. 173). Humility was not, of course, a characteristic of those who sought personal self-aggrandizement; but the statue of the benefactor may in fact be posthumous, as the temple of Saturn (195 CE) where it was found is known to have been built from a legacy.

Around the same time, some African sculptors developed new versions of imperial portraiture, turning their back on Italian conventions and opting for a face structure that is taller than usual from forehead to chin, with large, staring eyes and an exuberant treatment of the luxuriant beard. The emphasis on a penetrating gaze foreshadowed later developments in Italy. Some of these African portraits were of colossal size, in keeping with an image of prosperity and self-confidence. The trend starts with a massive head of Lucius Verus from Dougga in the 160s (Slim 2001, 145), but gathers momentum with examples like a doleful Jupiter from Sétif (Leschi 1952, 154), or the huge, imposing portraits of Marcus Aurelius, Commodus, and Septimius Severus from Markouna (now in the Louvre), with their striking eyes looking upwards, smooth surfaces for the fleshy parts of the face, yet rigid and mechanical depiction of the hair and beard (Baratte 1983). The gigantic Medusa head from a fountain building at Hippo (sadly stolen during Algeria’s troubles in the 1990s), with a vast open mouth from which water cascaded, is symptomatic of the same trend (Vilímková 1963, pl. 12). No effort was wasted, however, on what could not be seen. The sultry Severus from the Temple of the Severan family at Djemila, for example, was set up against the temple’s back wall, and designed therefore to be viewed only from the front as a two-dimensional image (Wood and Wheeler 1966, pl. 46; Lancel 2003, 192). A glance at the side view shows instantly the head’s lack of depth, with the hair no more than sketched out at the back, a feature that it shares also with the Markouna portraits.

Another third-century development unique to Africa was the creation of “slab statues.” That from Borj El-Amri (near Tunis) is the most impressive. Standing a full 2 meters high, the sculpture is a mere 14.5 centimeters thick (Cacan de Bissy and Petit 1982, no. 174; Slim 2001, 213). This competent piece was probably set into a tomb façade, creating a new kind of two-dimensional, large-scale architectural decoration. Its iconography is unparalleled and problematical: he wears the lion skin of Hercules, carries corn ears (of Ceres?), and holds the lead of a dog (Cerberus?). The striking visage with worried looks recalls those of the soldier-emperor portraits of third-century Italy.

Side by side with these more or less “Roman” products, there exists another sculptural approach, heir to Carthaginian and Numidian traditions, that generally preferred local stone to marble, and expressed itself in characteristically flat, two-dimensional reliefs (especially votive and funerary ones), rather than in the round. It occurs just as plentifully in places that started life as *coloniae*, so it is in no way confined to the backwoods. At Djemila (Cuicul), for example, one might have thought that an altar as important as that for the Capitulum, c. 150 CE, would have been executed in tolerably “Roman” fashion; and indeed, one face has a passable version of a winged Victory emerging from an acanthus plant in a vase—a mainstream Roman image of Hellenistic origin used, for example, in the Temple of the Deified Julius Caesar at Rome. The adjacent panel on the Djemila altar ([Figure 25.1](#)), however, depicts a sacrificial scene, in which all the necessary elements—bull, chicken, and sheep (the sacrificial creatures), attendant, altar, knife, jug, and libation pan (*patera*)—are arranged haphazardly in registers with a total disregard for scale: the jug is the same height as the altar, and the sheep is bigger than the bull (Vilímková 1963, pl. 9). The message is clear, but the effect is as much decorative as narrative: naturalism is emphatically rejected.



Figure 25.1 Djemila, altar, relief showing sacrifice.

Photo: R.J.A. Wilson.

The style is most vividly seen in votive reliefs, especially in the huge series of stelae in honour of Saturn (the Carthaginian Baal Hammon worshipped under the thinnest of Roman guises): some 3,000 are known, the latest of 323 CE (LeGlay 1961/1966; Cacan de Bissy and Petit 1982, no. 160; Février 1971, pls. 54–56). The one illustrated ([Figure 25.2](#)), from Timgad in Algeria, is typical: Saturn flanked by Sol and Luna at the top; the offerand and his wife in the center; and a sacrificial ram below. Details such as hairstyle and drapery are minimal. Symmetry and decorative effect are more important than realism, but these little reliefs with their smiling faces and bulging, almond-shaped eyes have a charm and simplicity all their own.



Figure 25.2 Timgad, votive relief in honor of Saturn.

Photo: R.J.A. Wilson.

In similar tradition is the remarkable group of 40-odd votives of circa 50–150 CE from a sanctuary near Mactar in central Tunisia (the so-called Ghorfa stelae), probably in honor of Caelestis, the Romano-African version of the all-powerful Carthaginian goddess Tanit (Cacan de Bissy and Petit 1982, nos. 154–156; M'charek 1988). The top of each of these depicts the divinity with flat body in the form of a truncated cone, an anthropomorphized version of the pre-Roman symbol of this goddess; she holds an outsize bunch of grapes and three pomegranates, potent symbols of fecundity. Sun and crescent moon are generally above her, and Liber (Bacchus) and his consort Libera flank her. The debt to the Greco-Roman tradition, with knowledge of classical architecture and of the attributes of gods and goddesses, is abundantly clear; but the flat, simplified style and contrived composition are wholly African, and the result is a genuine synthesis of Roman and African elements.

The same simple linear and two-dimensional style, with large eyes and perfunctory surface grooves to depict drapery, is also present in many Romano-African tombstones, including military ones. When Marcus Licinius from Lyon in Gaul, a soldier with the Third Augustan legion then stationed in Haidra, died in the late first century, his tombstone, with its flat, featureless rendering of Marcus leading two minuscule ponies by the rein, was surely executed by an African hand (Cacan de Bissy and Petit 1982, no. 150; Slim 2001, 218). Another African curiosity is the placing at the foot of the stele of a flat-lying stone in the form of a libation tray (carved with fish, wine jugs, and the like); it was fashionable in central and eastern Algeria during the second and third centuries, with a few outliers elsewhere (Ferhat, Seba, and Striedter 2003, 126; Sintès and Rebahi 2003, nos. 117–118).

Clay products

Africans had a rich tradition in terracotta products, and their long-lived pottery industry, which for seven centuries supplied markets across the length and breadth of the Mediterranean and beyond, is one of the success stories of ancient craft production. Artistically, the most extraordinary product of these African ceramicists is the series of third- and early fourth-century mold-made head vases, with a conical pot on top and handles behind, that were signed (uniquely for Africa) by half a dozen workshops; Navigius' was the most prolific (Flecker 2005). A related group features grotesque heads with smaller caricatured heads on top ([Figure 25.3](#)). These ancient equivalents of “Toby jugs” betoken a lively and inventive coroplastic production unique in the Roman world.



Figure 25.3 African red slip head vase, made in central Tunisia. Cologne, Römisch-Germanisches Museum.

Photo: R.J.A. Wilson.

Large-scale terracotta statuary continued in Africa longer than in many other provinces. One striking example of the first century CE comes from a sanctuary at Bir Bou Rekba near Hammamet (Slim 2001, 90). It is a remarkable full-length standing figure of the protecting spirit (“Genius”) of the province of Africa, with human female body, birds’ wings swathing the legs, and the head of a lion (rather than a lioness). The iconography derives from the Egyptian lioness-headed goddess Sekhmet, the symbol of solar power, but the imagery has been adapted for a new, specifically African use. With her fixed, fierce expression, designed to instill terror in her worshippers (African religion seems often to have relied on fostering a climate of fear), this is a masterpiece of Romano-African coroplastic art.

Mosaics

In the private sphere, the evident affluence of many Romano-African town houses is indicated above all by their mosaic pavements, which impress by their sheer quantity, their dazzling polychomy, and the richness and variety of both ornamental and figured designs (Dunbabin 1978; Blanchard-Lemée, Ennaifer, and Slim 1996; Ben Abed Ben Khader 2003). By the first half of the second century CE, African mosaicists were already branching out into ambitious floor designs in polychrome that were to leave a distinctive mark on the evolution of this medium in antiquity. Initially, some of the decorative elements and the overall floor patterns were borrowed from the Italian repertoire, but very rapidly these became more complicated and more novel, and from the start such compositions were carried out in polychrome at a time when pavements in Italy were predominantly black and white. There are also some early African examples of wall-to-wall figured compositions, such as the agricultural and Nilotic scenes from El Alia (Picard 1990), or the exquisite Triumph of Neptune mosaic from the site at La Chebba ([Figure 25.4](#)), both on the east coast of Tunisia (Ben Abed Ben Khader 2003, pl. 92), while some examples from the coastal villas of Tripolitania (western Libya) show equally precocious and radical developments in floor design too. Most second-century mosaics, however, confined their figured decoration to circles, squares, octagons, and the like within a predominantly geometric-patterned floor, a style that remained popular down into the fourth century. Particularly striking are the rich floral patterns at Timgad, where mosaicists developed a highly original and distinctive style from the end of the second century onwards (Germain 1969). Of all ancient mosaics, the wonderful series of intricate ornamental designs from here comes closest to resembling carpets in stone.

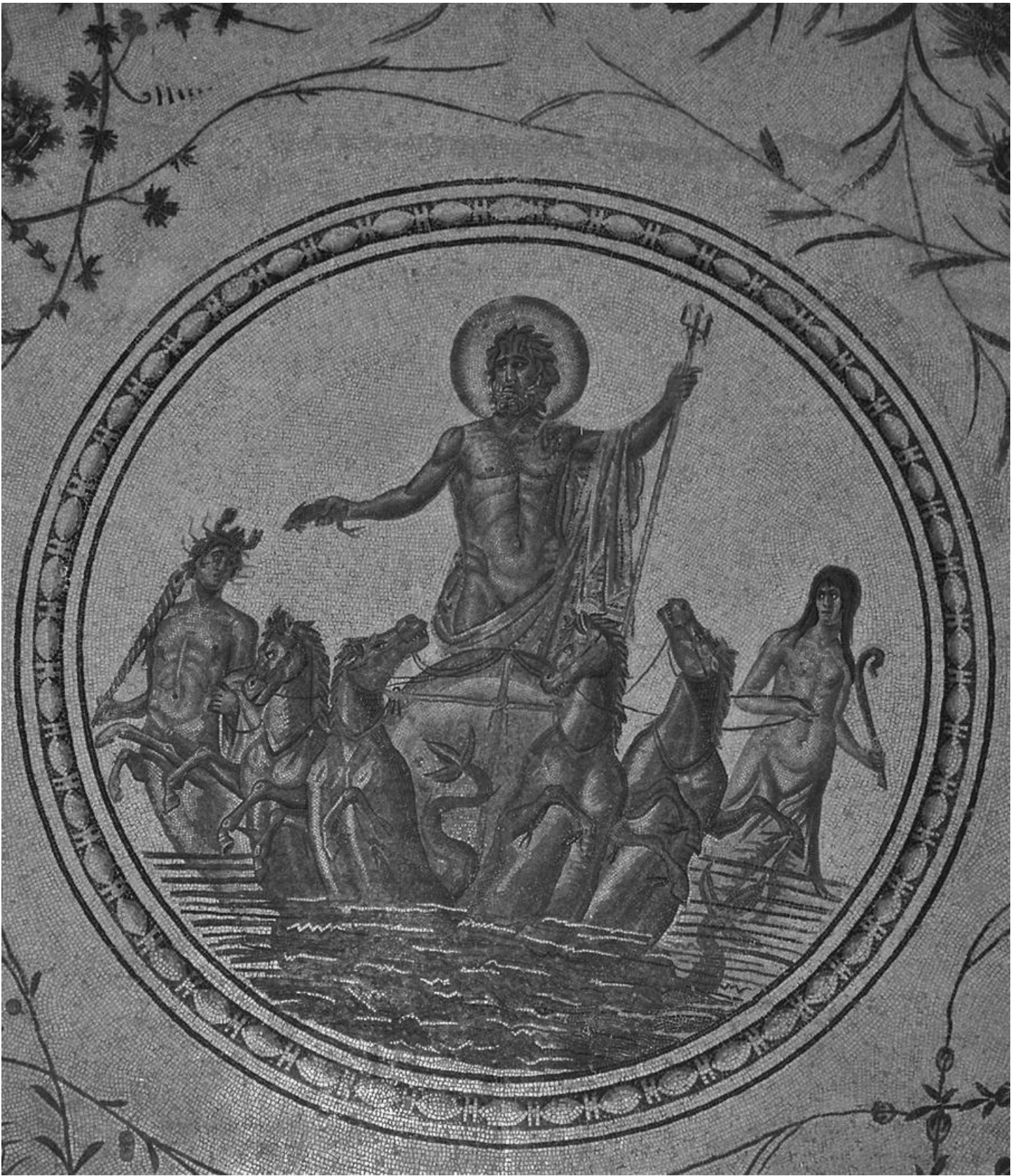


Figure 25.4 La Chebba, mosaic of Neptune, detail. Tunis, Bardo Museum.

Photo: R.J.A. Wilson.

The full flowering of the art of mosaic in Africa came in the third and fourth centuries, when the industry at its peak enjoyed a prodigious output, reflecting the zenith of African prosperity.

Great figured tableaux, the scenes often arranged by register with separate ground lines, predominate now in the principal rooms of the house. There is some interest in the classical myths, although it is less marked than elsewhere in the western provinces. Other themes were chosen on grounds of decorative appeal alone, such as the very popular marine scenes teeming with fish, dolphins, and other creatures, real and fantastical, all set in a sea of zigzag lines (an African trademark). Another distinctively African idea was the depiction of a gigantic Oceanus head at the center or near the top of some of the grander marine compositions, like the magnificent third-century example from the baths of Themetra near Sousse ([Figure 14.5](#): Ben Abed Ben Khader 2003, pl. 346). Scenes of agricultural production, the source of the wealth reflected by the very presence of mosaics, are not common, although they include an outstandingly detailed and realistic third-century mosaic at Cherchel, with scenes of plowing, broadcasting seed by hand, and hoeing in a vineyard (Ferdi 2005, 114–117); and sometimes a town-house mosaic depicted the owner's country villa and its estate, as in the so-called *dominus Julius* mosaic at Carthage of circa 400 CE ([Figure 21.6](#): Sarnowski 1978, pl. 2; Slim 2001, 122).

The overwhelming preference, however, is for scenes depicting either favorite pastimes (such as hunting) or the generous benefactions of patrons, who often chose to have spectacular displays of animals in the local amphitheater or chariot racing in the circus commemorated on the floors of their private homes as a permanent record of their munificence. The Smirat mosaic of circa 225–250 CE near Sousse (Tunisia), showing professional animal hunters (*venatores*) despatching leopards in the arena ([Figure 14.4](#)), emphatically articulates this function (Slim 2001, 170–171): “you will give the show at your own expense ... this is what it means to be rich, to be powerful,” the accompanying inscription proclaims loudly. In these and similar mosaics, the floor is being used more than as a colorful piece of interior décor—it is an instrument of the owner's status and power.

The Spanish Provinces

Rome's first contact with the Iberian peninsula came late in the third century BCE as a direct result of the growing power struggle with Carthage, which already had established settlements on the Spanish littoral. A fledgling Roman town of retired soldiers was settled at Italica near Seville as early as 206 BCE, but such was the unsettled state of affairs in Spain, with the Celtiberian tribes exerting relentless pressure, that the stable conditions that allow visual culture to flourish were not achieved until Julius Caesar's victory over Pompey at Munda in 45 BCE; and even then, the Cantabrian and Asturian tribes of the northwest were not pacified until further campaigns were waged under Augustus between 26 and 19 BCE. There is some sculpture under Roman influence that can certainly be ascribed to the Republican period, such as anonymous togate statues in local limestone at Tarragona, or the flat reliefs showing soldiers (one a musician) of circa 100 BCE from Ossuna that probably once decorated a funerary monument (Trillmich et al. 1993, pls. 130–131). However, despite our knowledge of the physical development of some towns during the later Republic, major works of art are few and far between. It is really only from the Augustan period that the artistic production of the

Iberian provinces under Rome accelerates in both quantity and quality (Tarradell 1969; De Alarcão 1988; Arce, Ensoli, and La Rocca 1997; Almagro-Gorbea & Álvarez Martínez 1998).

Sculpture

The Augustan reorganization saw the creation of three new provinces: Baetica in the south, with its capital at Cordoba; Taraconnensis in central and eastern Spain, ruled from Tarragona; and Lusitania, embracing much of Portugal as well as parts of western Spain, which had a newly created capital at Mérida. A building boom, lasting well into the second century, dramatically transformed the physical appearance of these three cities and others in their immediate orbit into showpieces that could boast architectural magnificence and sculptural adornment that were a match for Italy itself. The sheer quantity of marble sculpture in the round that has been found in or near the major cities of the south and east—of emperors, of local benefactors, of divinities, most of it of the highest quality—is astonishing. That raises questions as to who carved it. Even though Spain has good sources of white marble, there was no tradition of marble carving in the peninsula before the Augustan period. It must be assumed therefore that, as in Africa, the majority of the earliest work was carved in Spain by itinerant immigrant sculptors, perhaps initially as in Rome from the Greek East, whether using local or imported materials. This is especially true of Baetica, the province that was to produce men like the poet Lucan and the family of the emperor Trajan, where already in the Julio-Claudian period the sculptural sophistication is such that it is often hard to distinguish its products from those of contemporary Rome.

The closeness of the links with Rome is manifest in other ways. Take some of the relief sculpture, for example, that adorns the public buildings of the showplace capitals. The provincial forum at Tarragona boasted circular *tondi* with Ammon heads, in direct imitation of those in the Forum of Augustus at Rome, and a similar forum at Mérida, probably of Claudian date, mirrors the same Rome model in using caryatids as well as Ammon heads in the entablature of its porticoes (Trillmich et al. 1993, pls. 56–57, 102). A processional relief with sacrifice, also from Mérida, perhaps showing Agrippa as founder of the *colonia* there, echoes scenes on the Ara Pacis in Rome (Trillmich et al. 1993, pl. 61); while a superb altar with laurel bush and snake, also from Mérida, uses Apolline imagery promoted by Augustus, whose favorite god Apollo was. In Cordoba a circular mausoleum (itself a type copied from Rome) is decorated by a garland swag worthy of the best work in the capital.

Nor is this display of Hispanic pride in, and loyalty to, Rome confined to works in the public sphere. Julio-Claudian marble busts from the necropolis at Carmona, for example, a relatively minor town near Seville, frequently showed awareness of current trends in the portrait sculpture of Rome itself. A male head from the Tomb of the Servilii at Carmona displays both the characteristic triangular structure and the individual features of portraits of Julio-Claudian princes such as Drusus Germanicus, but the hairstyle is completely different; while another of a young man from the same necropolis has a fork in the middle of his hair, exactly as seen in portraits at Rome of the young Nero, the young Britannicus, and other members of the imperial family in their youth (Franz and Greenland 2003, 640–646). The local Hispano-Romans whom these images depict wanted to underscore their loyalty to Rome and to imitate Roman fashions:

it was a clear and emphatic statement of their *Romanitas*.

Yet, for all their “Roman” qualities, there can be little doubt that the vast majority of all of this sculptural output, once the initial phase of immigrant craftsmen was over, was the work of local Hispano-Roman sculptors. That even work of the highest quality occasionally shows unusual features suggests as much. A marble bust of a woman at Mérida, for example, of the first century CE, has a looped arrangement of curls fringing the forehead, and a pair of pointed sideburns coming forward onto the cheek—both features that must reflect a local hairstyle (she has been dubbed “the gypsy”) and probably a local sculptor (Tarradell 1969, pls. 26–27). A fine marble statue of either Venus or, perhaps more likely, a youthful nymph, perhaps of Trajanic date, from baths at the mining town of Munigua, not far from Seville, has straight, unadorned, flaxen hair quite unlike anything known in Italy ([Figure 25.5](#); Trillmich et al. 1993, pl. 185). While a cut above the level of most marble sculpture in this backwoods town (such as a heavy-handed and very “provincial” version of the emperor Domitian: Trillmich et al. 1993, pl. 135), the Venus was probably brought from a workshop in a nearby center such as Italica, a city with a known capacity for turning out marble sculpture of high quality, using both imported and local white marbles (Rodá 1997; Beltrán Fortes 2010). Yet even at Munigua, surprising Italian credentials are expressed by its little hilltop temple with approach ramps, unmistakably built in clear imitation of the sanctuary of Fortuna at Palestrina near Rome (Schattner 2003, 27–39).



Figure 25.5 Munigua, marble head of a young woman, possibly a nymph. Seville, Museo Arqueológico Provincial.

Photo: Neg. D-DAI-MAD-WIT-R-027-83-02.

Nor is sculpture of the highest standard confined to urban centers: the residential rural villas of wealthy Hispano-Romans have also yielded much material (Koppel 1993). Examples include a fine bronze depicting winged Hypnos (Sleep), from the villa at El Ruedo (Almédina) near Granada (Vaquerizo and Noguera 1997); the sophisticated busts of a bearded man and a woman, of Antonine date, from the villa at Becerill de Campos (Palencia), presumably representing its owners (Curchin 2004, 105); and the charming marble head of a woman, a superlative work of the early second century, from the large villa of Milreu on the Algarve coast of Portugal, which may represent the *domina* of the villa at that time (Fittschen 1993; Trillmich et al. 1993, pl. 161). The last example, with an elaborate hairdo consisting of three lines of “guilloche” arranged in parallel rows around the forehead, echoes a style sometimes favored in Rome by Vibia Matidia, Trajan’s sister-in-law, and is a further reflection of the determination of the Hispano-Roman elite, here on the very western fringes of the Roman Empire, to be up to date and *à la mode* with contemporary tastes in Rome.

Also belonging to the private sphere are marble sarcophagi, of which, given the size and considerable wealth of the Iberian peninsula, there are surprisingly few examples. Most represent imports from Italy, with a few Attic products also reaching Spain in the third century. Many of the locally produced marble sarcophagi copied Italian models, such as those that feature the Muses (in Tarragona and Lisbon) or the Seasons (in Gerona), but there are some that show genuine originality of composition. An Antonine sarcophagus in Munigua displays a very unusual symmetric composition of cupids and lions arranged either side of a central tree (Schattner 2003, pl. 77c), and one in Lisbon depicting a boy in the central *tondo*, with cupids picking grapes in the field around, is an arrangement not precisely paralleled in Italy. This example also bears an ovolo (egg-and-dart) and astragal (bead-and-reel) decoration along the top edge, escapes from the world of architectural ornament here making an exceptional appearance in a sarcophagus (Koch and Sichtermann 1982, 308–311, fig. 334).

What little sculpture there is emanating from the northern and northwestern parts of Spain has a different character, largely untouched by the influence of the cosmopolitan coastal cities. This was an area where so-called Celtiberian deities held sway, worshipped in pre-Roman times and still a potent force throughout the Roman period. Only in the first century CE do inscriptions reveal for the first time some of their names, and symbols on altars tell us something of their character (Curchin 2004, 170–177). The bull and the horse were sacred animals; the celestial symbolism of the sun, moon, and stars, including wheels and swastikas, is common; and conifers also appear, a reference to sacred groves. Martial (4.55.23) mentions one of these near his hometown of Bilbilis in northern Spain. An open-air sanctuary near Braga in Portugal has a rock carving dedicated by Celicus Fronto in honor of Tongo Nabiagos and Nabia; their attributes, a hammer and a dove, appear in the pediment of a niche carved with a bust of the dedicant, and what may be a full-length standing figure of Nabia, holding a cornucopia, is also hewn out of the rock further to the left (Trillmich et al. 1993, pl. 147). There is, however, no rich series of sculpted images of these and other indigenous godlings, such as there is for Gaul. In fact, the most common Romano-Iberian commemorative sculpture in the northwestern part of the peninsula are granite figures of standing bulls, lacking much sculptural detail and in any case now very worn. Scores are known in the territory of the

Vettones tribe in northwest Spain: four examples, each up to 1.50 meters high, now stand in a row at El Tiemblo (Avila), known as the “Bulls of Guisando.” Some of the Spanish bull figures may be pre-Roman, but they continued to be carved in the Roman period when they served as grave markers: one of those at El Tiemblo was a memorial set up by one Longinus to his father Priscus in the early second century CE (Trillmich et al. 1993, pls. 24–25).

If the yield of religious sculpture in the Roman period from the northern Iberian peninsula is disappointing, the same area by contrast has produced an extensive series of decorated funerary stelae. These have a distinctive character totally unlike anything else in the western provinces (Tarradell 1969, pls. 4, 110–111, 131–133; Curchin 1991, 184–186; Trillmich et al. 1993, figs. 122–123). Taking the form of upright gravestones, generally between 1 and 2 meters high, they usually feature somewhere on the stone a version of the solar disc. Often it is placed at the top and dominates the whole composition; indeed, the stone itself may have a rounded top to emphasize it. Sometimes the solar disc is adapted to form a wheel or a multipetaled rosette. In a subgroup (“discoid stelae”), direct descendants of pre-Roman slabs, the whole memorial is circular and is provided with a short support carved from the same piece of stone, so that the tombstone itself is completely off the ground (Franz and Greenland 2003, 636–640). In all versions a panel with a Latin inscription commemorating the deceased appears at the center, and sometimes a further panel above or below it features flat two-dimensional reliefs in silhouette, with no attempt at modeling; presumably color once highlighted details. The subject matter is varied: many show the deceased on horseback, alone or with a companion (a direct continuation of pre-Roman funerary imagery); hunting scenes are also depicted; another shows the deceased, a woman, seated in front of a table; others have panels containing one or more animals. The rest of the stone is also covered with decoration, which might be architectural, or show abstract patterns, or deploy other symbols such as swastikas or the crescent moon, and there is occasionally a border of vine, ivy, or acanthus scroll. Gravestones of this type are found in a broad swathe of territory across northern Spain, from Navarra in the east to Galicia in the west, and extend also into northern Portugal; particularly fine examples can be seen in museums at Pamplona, Burgos, and Vigo. They date mainly from the later first century to the third. The execution of these grave stelae is perfunctory and stylized, but for all their naivety they have considerable appeal. This was a different world to the slick and sophisticated milieu of the cities on the Mediterranean shore.

Mosaics

Spanish mosaics were essentially conservative until the second half of the second century CE. Late Republican pavements of *opus signinum* with white tessera inlay gave way in the first century CE to black-and-white mosaics in the Italian tradition: there are good examples of both at Ampurias in northeast Spain. Ampurias also has a handful of examples (Augustan or Julio-Claudian?) of prefabricated figured *emblemata* set in terracotta trays, unique in Spain; the finest depicts the sacrifice of Iphigenia (Marcet and Sanmartí 1990, 147, cf. 142 and 157). The hypothesis that these were imported from overseas, probably from Italy, has been strengthened by the 2003 discovery near Agde (southern France) of a contemporary *emblema* in a very similar style, found underwater (and so from a ship that failed to make its destination); it

shows Apollo delivering his judgment on the fate of Marsyas (Sanchez and Vincent 2008, 21).

Black-and-white mosaics continued to predominate for much of the second century. There are occasional signs of an unusual theme, such as the villa owner at Marbella who depicted kitchen equipment and items of food in a strip along one side of his peristyle corridor ([Figure 25.6](#)), as though to whet the appetites of his guests on their way to the dining room; but by and large the subject matter is conventional and mirrors themes popular in Italy (Dunbabin 1999, 145–146). Occasional touches of polychrome were sometimes added to black-and-white compositions (as in one of the rooms in the Marbella villa), which was a purely Spanish idea, but only in the second half of the second century, perhaps under the influence of Gaul (see a later section of this chapter), did all-polychrome pavements make an appearance, at first predominantly with ornamental designs.



Figure 25.6 Marbella, villa, detail of peristyle mosaic.

Photo: R.J.A. Wilson.

That patrons with more ambitious ideas for the interior decoration of their houses were frustrated by the service available locally is suggested by the action taken by the owner of a house at Mérida, who sometime toward the end of the second century CE commissioned an astonishing mosaic quite unlike anything else in Spain. The crowded composition consists entirely of allegorical figures arranged in groups around what may have been the central figure of Aeternitas (the mosaic is damaged). At the top, Caelum (the Heavens), the Sun and the

Moon, and the Winds and Clouds are represented; then come terrestrial figures, including Natura (Nature), Mons (Mountain), and the Seasons; while at the bottom are depicted river gods (the Nile and the Euphrates) and allegories of, among others, Copiae (Plenty), Navigia (Shipping), and Pharos (Lighthouse). The background color varies from deep blue for the watery foreground to a turquoise colour for the ethereal regions at the top. The mosaic, which appears to represent the Cosmos and its prosperity, is likely to have been laid by an itinerant eastern mosaicist, perhaps from Syria, although the original design may be Alexandrian in inspiration; the labeling of the figures in Latin rather than Greek may be a concession to his western patron. Technically, in its careful modeling of the figures, and in the use of very small tesserae, there is no finer mosaic in Spain (Alföldi 1979, 1–34).

The great flowering of the mosaic pavements of the Iberian peninsula, especially in the villas of the countryside, belongs to the third and the fourth centuries, to which the majority of the figured pavements belong (Guardia Pons 1992). A wide range of mythological scenes continue to be popular down to late antiquity, and themes that occur in North Africa, including circus mosaics (at Italica, Barcelona, near Gerona, and elsewhere), the Triumph of Dionysus, Orpheus, Oceanus, and scenes of hunting, are also reflected in the Spanish repertory. That raises the question of the extent of African influence on the Spanish pavements. Only in one case, a floor from a villa at Ramalete (Navarra), featuring the *dominus* Dulcitius out hunting, is the presence of an itinerant African mosaicist in Spain likely: the overall framework of the pavement consists of laurel-wreath medallions identical to those used in Africa, but not attested anywhere else in Spain (Guardia Pons 1992, pl. 35; Dunbabin 1978, 220). Elsewhere, iconographical similarities between the two regions are in some cases close enough to suggest that African cartoons circulated in Spain, perhaps especially in the third century when Spanish mosaicists first ventured to lay ambitious figured compositions; but in general, while African echoes are present, the style of the Spanish floors is very different.

An example from the luxurious late Roman villa at Carranque (c. 375/400?), between Madrid and Toledo, must suffice here to illustrate the point. Houses in Africa frequently have the architectural feature of a semi-circular fountain projecting into the garden opposite the principal dining room; furthermore, as we have seen above, massive Oceanus heads were popular in both private reception rooms and public baths. At Carranque, the creation of a semi-circular space opposite the *triclinium* reflects African architectural practice, even though here it was not designed to hold water; the imposing head of Oceanus is likewise an echo of an African design ([Figure 25.7](#)). Yet the choice of Oceanus to decorate the floor of a pseudo-fountain basin (where it is never used in Africa), the particular stylization of the beard, and the absence of ‘wavy-line’ sea on either side of the head show how far the Spanish mosaicist had moved away from his African model (Fernández-Galiano 1994).



Figure 25.7 Carranque, villa, Oceanus mosaic, detail.

Photo: R.J.A. Wilson.

A word to close this section about the astonishing and rare survival, albeit fragmentary, of a mosaic of circa 350 CE decorating the dome of a chamber in a rural villa at Centcelles, near Tarragona; it is 10.70 meters in diameter (Hauschild and Arbeiter 1993; Arce 2002). Three concentric bands of figured decoration surround a central circle (of which the composition is lost). The outermost depicts a hunting tableau, including depictions of the *dominus*' villa and of deer being driven into a net; the next band shows biblical scenes from both the Old and New Testaments, including Jonah and the whale and Daniel in the lions' den; and the innermost of the three shows enthroned persons receiving audiences, separated by panels depicting the seasons. The inner bands, further from the viewer, opt for heavy outlines and bold colors for greater visibility; that included the use, in the innermost frieze, of gold leaf on the background tesserae. The employment of the latter here provides a reminder, even if few examples now survive, of the crucial role played by mosaicists in the Roman Empire in pioneering the technique of gold-ground mosaics in vaults and domes, so providing an important legacy to the Byzantine and early medieval world.

Gaul and Germany

The Mediterranean coastline of Gaul and its immediate hinterland was settled by Greeks at the end of the seventh century BCE (Marseilles was their principal foundation), but from the later second century BCE the area (known then as Gallia Transalpina) became absorbed within the orbit of Rome. The rest of Gaul was not brought within the Roman Empire until the conquests of Julius Caesar in the 50s BCE, but as elsewhere, it was not until the reign of Augustus that formal provincial organization took place. New towns, in some cases realizing Caesar's fledgling plans, were established in the plains to replace, for the most part, the old Iron Age hill-top settlements. The province on the south coast, from then on called Gallia Narbonensis after its capital at Narbonne, also stretched up the Rhone valley to Vienne and included territory to the northeast as far as Lake Geneva (Rivet 1988; Gros 2008). Gallia Lugdunensis embraced a crescent-shaped swathe of what is now central and northwestern France as far north as Rouen and as far west as Brest; its capital, Lugdunum (Lyon), lay eccentrically near its southernmost border (Le Bohec 2008; Ferdière 2011). To the south and southwest of it was Gallia Aquitania, a much larger area than modern Aquitaine (Bouet 2015). Gallia Belgica occupied what is now northeast France and Belgium (hence the latter's name), but also Luxembourg and much of the Moselle valley in Germany (Wightman 1985). The frontier region of Germania, comprising parts of Germany west of the Rhine (and in due course a little east of the river too), as well as the Netherlands, Switzerland, and a portion of eastern France, was not formally created until the reign of Domitian (83/85 CE), who divided it into two provinces, Superior and Inferior; the boundary was set near modern Remagen on the Rhine (Carroll 2001; Bechert 2007).

Sculpture in stone

Within this vast area there were, of course, huge regional differences. Not surprisingly, it is in the Mediterranean coastal cities where we find the most sophisticated expressions of visual culture. Much effort and money were expended under Augustus and Tiberius in turning the Caesarian and early Augustan foundations or re-foundations—Narbonne, Arles, Nîmes, Béziers, Orange, Fréjus—into showpieces of Italian-style magnificence. The superb marble portraits of members of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, from Arles and Béziers in particular, carved in Carrara marble, are indistinguishable from their counterparts in Italy, and were probably imported from there (Balty and Cazes 1995; Droste 2003, 47–52); but that Italian craftsmen were also on the spot helping to execute the ambitious building programs that these cities undertook seems also very likely. Some of the sculptural detail in the Augustan theatre at Arles, for example, including a fine marble altar depicting Apollo (Droste 2003, fig. 158, cf. also fig. 159) and marble reliefs with exquisite acanthus spirals worthy of the Ara Pacis, were probably carved *in situ* by immigrant craftsmen. At Narbonne, the principal known temple was built expensively of Carrara marble imported from Italy, along no doubt with the skilled sculptors who must have been required to carve its Corinthian capitals (each a massive 2 meters tall) and other decorative details; impressive fragments survive (Solier 1986, 41–46). At the same time, it seems likely that such men were also helping to train Gaulish sculptors. The superbly preserved “Maison Carrée” at Nîmes, for example, an Augustan temple built in local fine white limestone (not marble) in honor of the imperial cult, is a scaled-down version of the Temple of Apollo Sosianus at Rome; yet the variation in detail and in execution of its running acanthus frieze, while closely based on models in Rome, suggests that it was very probably executed by competent local sculptors under Italian guidance (Amy and Gros 1978; Gros et al. 2011).

Such expressions of loyalty to Rome, and close artistic links with the metropolis, are not surprising in *coloniae* lying on or near the Mediterranean with easy access to Italy by sea. However, similar links with Rome in the early principate can also be seen elsewhere in Gaul, such as on the Altar of the Three Gauls in Lyon (Naumann-Steckner 2010, fig. 9), or on the memorial monument to Caius and Lucius Caesar in the far north, at Reims (Deru 2010, fig. 75): both have garland swags that are again very reminiscent of the Ara Pacis. Such “official” monuments no doubt had input from the provincial governor’s office, but the role of members of the local aristocracy anxious to express their loyalty to Rome is not to be underestimated. Take the case of Caius Julius Rufus, for example. He paid for the amphitheater that formed part, with the Altar, of the Sanctuary of the Three Gauls at Lyon (*L’année épigraphique* 1959, 61), but his hometown was Saintes in Aquitania. There he was responsible, in 18/19 CE, for another quintessentially Roman type of structure, a triumphal arch (with two openings) in the center of the bridge across the local river (*CIL* 13.1036). His name sounds thoroughly Roman, and indeed the “Gaius” and the “Julius” derive from the fact that his grandfather had been granted Roman citizenship by Julius Caesar; but the *cognomina* of his father (Catuaneunos) and his grandfather (Gedomo), and the name of his great-grandfather (Epotsovoridos), all proudly named for us on the arch at Saintes, clearly demonstrate his purely Gallic ancestry. Rome depended on such local aristocrats to promote “Roman” values in their newly won provinces,

in Gaul as everywhere else.

The vast majority of sculpture in Gaul, however, is less strongly derivative from Italian models, and rather displays a hybrid quality conveniently labeled by modern scholarship as “Gallo-Roman”—indigenous creations, but ones that often demonstrate in their iconography and style influence that ultimately derives from the Greco-Roman world of the Mediterranean (Nerzic 1989). Particularly plentiful are votive sculptures from temple precincts or depictions of divinities from other contexts (decorative as much as religious; Deyts 1998; van Andringa 2002). Representational stone sculpture, some of it monumental, had already made its appearance in Gaul during the pre-Roman Iron Age. Some of the iconographical types, such as the male divinity sitting cross-legged on the ground, often with torc around the neck, are attested from the fourth century BCE, yet they continued to appear throughout the Roman period (especially in the image of Cernunnos; see below). Other pre-Roman images, some perhaps large-scale, are likely to have been carved in wood. Julius Caesar (*The Gallic Wars* 6.17.1) famously mentioned that images of “Mercury” were plentiful among the Gauls, a popularity confirmed by the frequency of depictions of the god during the Roman period, but no image of the deity of certain pre-Roman date has survived, nor is his pre-Roman name established beyond doubt (Teutates?). A large-scale Roman-period example is the limestone statue from Lezoux (first/second century CE?), 2.50 meters high, which borrows from classical Mercury the characteristic money bag in hand and the winged hat, but in other ways is the antithesis of the carefree, naked, and clean-shaven youth of the classical tradition ([Figure 25.8](#)): he is middle-aged, bearded, grim-looking, and clothed, being wrapped in a heavy, hooded Gallic cloak (Nerzic 1989, 48). The cockerel and goat at his feet are popular attributes of Gaulish Mercury. The god is often shown elsewhere (and in Britain too) with a consort, Rosmerta, who forms no part of the classical tradition.

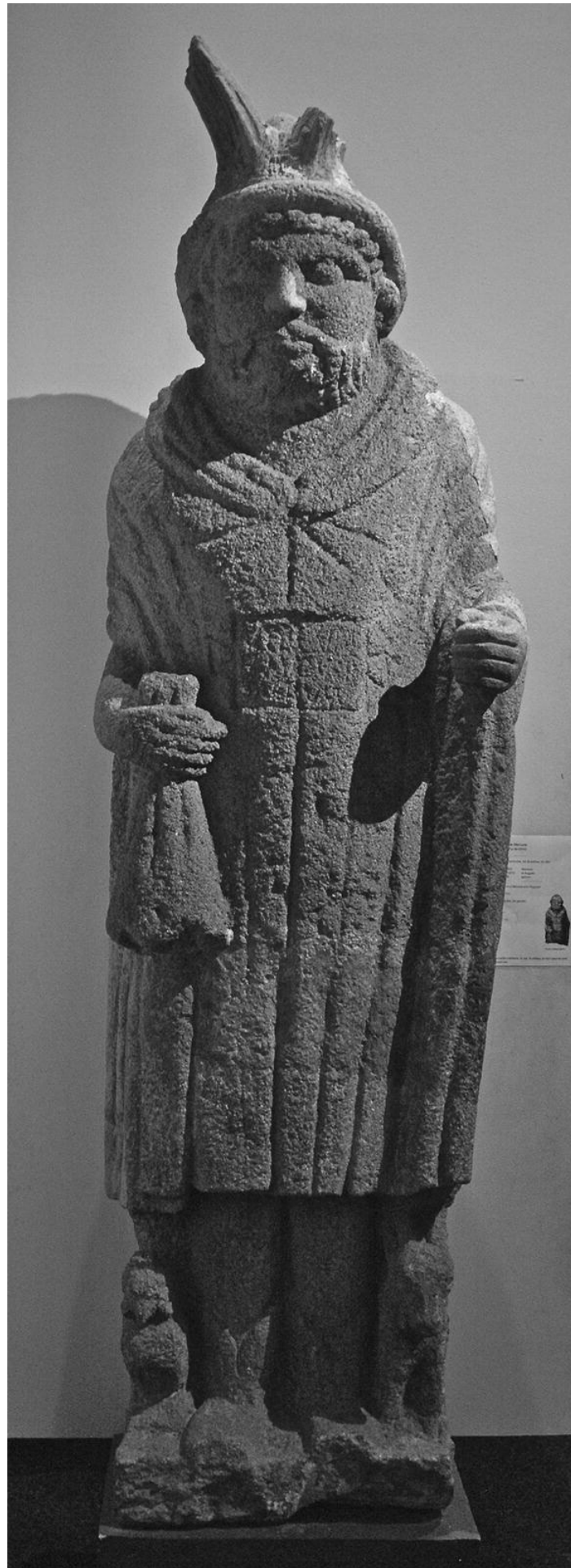


Figure 25.8 Lezoux, statue of Mercury. Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Musée d'Archéologie Nationale.

Photo: R.J.A. Wilson.

Another astonishing monument of Gallo-Roman hybridity, closely dated by its inscription to the reign of Tiberius (14–37 CE), is the limestone “pillar of the Seine boatmen” from Paris, where reliefs of the deities of the Roman pantheon, including Jupiter, Mars, Venus, Mercury, and Vulcan—all recognizable by their classical attributes (and in some cases identifying labels)—mingle with unfamiliar gods of the Celtic pantheon, Cernunnos, Esus, Smertrios, and Taurostrigaranus (Périn 1984, 275–307). All of the latter have an unusual and distinctive iconography. Esus (“Lord”), shown as a woodsman chopping at a willow, and Smertrios (“Provider”), depicted as a bearded man doing battle with a snake, later fade quickly from the record. By contrast, the Bull with the Three Cranes on its back (and also three horns on its head) retains popularity in Gaul throughout the Roman period, although the association with the cranes soon disappeared. The three-horned bull features in some 40 sculptures, many in bronze, such as the superlative lifesize head from Martigny in Switzerland (Wiblé 2008, fig. 394), or the miniature votive dedicated by one Boiiorix in Autun (Rebourg and Goudineau 2002, 69).

Cernunnos (the “horned one”) appears with rams’ horns on the Paris pillar (Pobé 1961, pl. 175), but he is more characteristically shown elsewhere in Gaul with antlers; he was lord of the animals, and presided over abundance and fertility in general (Altjohann 2003). Other images show him sitting cross-legged, sometimes on a pedestal, wearing a torc and often flanked by other gods. Examples include a relief from Reims (Pobé 1961, pl. 177; Deyts 1998, 120), with Apollo and Mercury in attendance, and one from Nuits-St-Georges (Nerzic 1989, 73), where a male *genius* is at the center, a goddess of plenty with cornucopia is to the left, and Cernunnos is on the right, there depicted standing rather than sitting. In this instance also he is shown with three faces, the two additional ones replacing ears on each side of the head. Mercury is also sometimes depicted thus, but there are many other examples of three-faced gods where the identification of the divinity is ambiguous (Figure 25.9). These striking depictions, especially widespread in northern and central Gaul, betray a Celtic love for triplism that also manifests itself in other ways: in the three-horned bulls mentioned earlier, or the numerous depictions of mother goddesses in triplicate, for example.

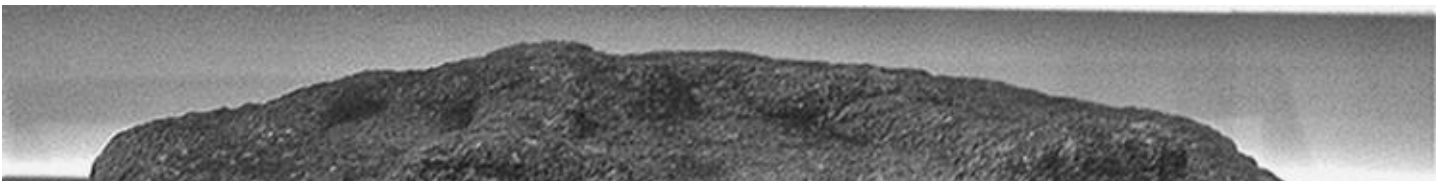




Figure 25.9 Naiz-aux-Forges (Meuse), three-faced god. Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Musée d'Archéologie Nationale.

Photo: R.J.A. Wilson.

The pillar of the Seine boatmen may once have been crowned with a statue of Jupiter on the

top; if so, it can be counted as the earliest example of another idiosyncratic sculptural creation in eastern Gaul and the Germanies, the Jupiter column (Bauchhenß and Noelke 1981; Noelke 2010–2011). The earliest certain and datable example, in Mainz, is Neronian, but over 900 examples are now known in all, whether whole or fragmentary, from country estates and rural shrines as well as towns; they were fashionable for some 200 years from the mid-first to the mid-third centuries CE. The form, once evolved, is fairly standard, and usually consists of three main parts: a square or polygonal base, on which are depicted images of deities, for the most part related to the sun, moon, and planets; a column decorated with a scale pattern or more elaborate vegetal or vine decoration, topped by a Corinthian or Composite capital; and, at the summit, a statue in the round of Jupiter brandishing a thunderbolt ([Figure 25.10](#)), usually depicted on horseback and riding over a giant whose thighs end in coiled serpents (e.g., Pobé 1961, pl. 184). Occasionally the Jupiter is not on horseback but seated on a throne, when the giant is absent; sometimes Juno is shown alongside him. The larger examples have been calculated as being as much as 14 meters high, but only one stands in its original position, at Cussy-la-Colonne in Burgundy, and here the upper part of its shaft and the capital are modern restorations (Ferdrière 2011, fig. 77). Jupiter columns are likely to have been stone incarnations of assumed timber predecessors of simpler form, erected in the Iron Age in honor of the Celtic sky god (“Taranis”), and it is thought that the curious Gallo-Roman iconography of Jupiter as a rider god has possible pre-Roman origins; however, the extent of Greco-Roman influence in shaping the composition (Jupiter conflated with Sol, perhaps, and the figure beneath him derived from the iconography of gigantomachies, for example) is hard to determine.



Figure 25.10 Hausen an der Zaber, Jupiter column (modern recreation in Xanten).

Photo: R.J.A. Wilson.

A further striking aspect of Gallo-Roman sculpture is the emphasis placed on funerary memorials. There is an impressive range of figured tombstones, including many of humble artisans proudly depicting themselves with the tools of their trade (Langner 2003). Gaul and Germany also have some astonishingly ambitious and grandiose funerary monuments, of which the Tomb of the Julii at Glanum (St Rémy-de-Provence), a uniquely well-preserved Augustan example (c. 25 BCE) closely linked to Italian models, is a precociously early precursor: it is nearly 20 meters high (Pobé 1961, pl. 76; Gros 2008, 26–29). Most, however, have been reconstructed on paper from fragments, either because they were found collapsed and partially robbed, or because the surviving parts have been extracted from late Roman walled enceintes, where the blocks were redeployed as substantial foundation material. The impressive tower tomb at Cologne of Lucius Poblicius, 14.60 meters high, surprises because it is not the funerary memorial of a high-ranking military officer or wealthy merchant, but rather that of an ordinary squaddie, retired (a *veteranus*) from the Legio V Alaudae (Precht 1979; Bechert 2007, fig. 74). Had the inscription not (partially) survived, no one would have guessed its occupant's lowly rank; perhaps he made a fortune in retirement. Three full-length statues stand in the upper story; the roof bore depictions of tritons, and at the summit Aeneas and Anchises; and the sides have highly accomplished reliefs of Pan and other followers of Bacchus. The monument is the earliest known (c. 40 CE) anywhere to employ the composite capital on the exterior of a building, so this is likely the work of a provincial sculptor in touch with contemporary developments at Rome.

The tradition of imposing tombs richly decorated with sculpture continued in the second and third centuries. Particularly impressive is the only one to survive intact, that at Igel on the Moselle near Trier, a massive 23 meters high; it owes its miraculous survival to a mistaken belief that Helena and Constantius Chlorus, parents of Constantine the Great, were depicted on it. In fact, the family is that of the Secundinii, wealthy cloth merchants in the first half of the third century; the reliefs on their commemorative pillar are a mixture of mythology and autobiography (Zahn 1982; Deru 2010, figs. 101–102). Among the latter are scenes of the selling of cloth, its baling up for sending, and its transport; of a family meal, of work in the kitchen, of tenants paying rent, and of an outing to town in a mule cart. Such vivid scenes of everyday life are characteristic of Gaulish funerary sculpture, as seen especially (for example) in the rich series of reliefs from Neumagen on the Moselle and from Arlon in Belgium (von Massow 1932; Lefèbvre 1990). The many monuments from the former include well-known scenes of wine barges on the Moselle, a schoolroom with a pupil arriving late, and a woman in a wicker chair at her toilette. The carving is competent and bold, and the realism of the subject matter is conveyed effectively, if somewhat simplistically: the individuals portrayed, with their often deep-set eyes and unsmiling faces, come across as stolid, hard-working, rather somber folk ([Figure 25.11](#)).



Figure 25.11 Neumagen, funerary relief, detail. Trier, Römisches Landesmuseum.

Photo: R.J.A. Wilson.

Metalwork

In addition to stone sculpture, Gaul and Germany have yielded a surprisingly large quantity of high-quality sculpture in metal, especially bronze (Boucher 1976). Here too, craftsmen were building on a rich tradition established during the pre-Roman Iron Age, and some bronzes continued to be made in the Roman period in the same native technique, hammering pieces with the help of a wooden framework: examples include the striking egg-shaped head with staring eyes from the second-century CE sanctuary at Genainville, northwest of Paris (Mitard 1982), and the first-century CE bearded warrior from Saint-Maur-en-Chaussée, made up of 22

separate pieces of metal hammered or fused together (Mohen 1989, 290). A related tradition was the manufacture of bronze masks, also generally votive (Eydoux 1962, pls. 276–279).

A particularly impressive example of Gaulish bronzeworking is the magnificent horse of the first century CE from the hoard at Neuvy-en-Sullias near Orléans, found in 1861 (Gorget 2007): standing at just over 1 meter high and weighing 45 kilograms, not counting the base, it is made of beaten bronze with a separately cast mane and reins. It is a proud creature, its left foreleg raised, but its stiff formality as well as its technique make its indigenous credentials clear. Its inscribed base, despite the superb quality of the Latin lettering, confirms as much: the horse represents the otherwise unknown Celtic god Rudobus, and the patrons who dedicated it, the Servii Esumagius Sacrovir and Seriomaglius Severus, have a mixed Gallo-Roman nomenclature typical of this period (*CIL* 13.3071; Ferdière 2011, figs. 10b–c). Another striking bronze from the same hoard shows a naked female figure, with legs akimbo and arms outstretched (“the dancer”; Eydoux 1962, figs. 274–275). Her sagging breasts, the perfunctory treatment of her hair and anatomy, and the greatly elongated form mark her out as the very antithesis of classical canons of beauty, but she has a natural grace and elegance all her own.

Other votive bronzes of rather later date show greater influence from the classical tradition, as in the rare depictions of the indigenous goddesses Sequana and Artio. Sequana, the divinity of the source of the Seine in Burgundy, stands majestic in a river boat with duck’s head prow (Klee 2013, 195, fig. 130); Artio, a goddess of fecundity and plenty and perhaps also protectress of animals, rocks back on her seat when confronted by a large and inquisitive female bear in front of a tree, in a charming votive from a hoard found at Muri, Switzerland (Pobé 1961, pl. 178; Kaufmann-Heinemann 2002). In each case the divinity is indigenous and the iconography novel, but both are draped in the time-honored Greco-Roman fashion of clothed female deities, that of tunic or longer garment and cloak.

Nor were indigenous Gaulish metalworkers averse to fashioning images of Roman emperors. An early attempt is a pair of votives commissioned by “Atespatus son of Crixus” and depicting, separately, Augustus and Livia; they were found at Neuilly-le-Réal in Auvergne, central France (van Andringa 2002, 181; Giroire and Roger 2007, no. 33; Lahusen 2010, 184–185). The bronzes, while recognizable as portraits of Augustus and his wife, are unmistakably of Gaulish workmanship. The imperial couple are depicted in old age, with bags under their eyes and, in Augustus’ case, a heavily lined forehead; yet these features are uniquely combined with hairstyles that belong to youthful portraits in the Italian series. It is as though the Gaulish craftsman was working from cartoons showing a range of different versions of Augustus and Livia, and chose to amalgamate features from more than one into the resulting composite images. Also Gaulish work is the spectacular gold bust of Marcus Aurelius, found in a Roman sewer at Avenches (Switzerland) in Gallia Belgica in 1939; 33.5 centimeters high, it is one of only two gold busts of an emperor surviving from anywhere in the Roman Empire (Pobé 1961, pl. 143; Furger and Müller 1991, 99; the other, of Septimius Severus, was found at Plotinopolis in Thrace in 1965: Lahusen 2010, 78, fig. 2.29). While the identity of Aurelius’ portrait is more or less certain by comparing it with other depictions of this emperor, the overall proportions of the Avenches bust (especially the low forehead), the superficial treatment of the hair and beard, and in particular the large, staring eyes firmly mark this out as

the product of a provincial goldsmith.

Other crafts: Pottery, terracotta, glass

Gaul was a major center of production for the red high-gloss table pottery known as *terra sigillata*, made first at Lyon circa 15–10 BCE, where it was closely tied to the slightly earlier production of such wares at Arezzo in Italy. Very soon after, it was being produced at La Graufesenque, near Millau on the Tarn, and later at many other places throughout Gaul (Bémont and Jacob 1986). At its best, with its pleasing mold-made designs and high sheen, this attractive product reached a Mediterranean-wide market: La Graufesenque *sigillata* has been found on the edge of the Sahara desert in Libya and at the eastern end of the Mediterranean in Israel (Bémont, Vernhet, and Beck 1987). At its height in the first century CE, output was immense, and the kilns used to fire it were correspondingly huge. Spare a thought for the potter Cirratus, who in one firing that went wrong circa 35–40 CE lost perhaps about 6,000 vessels in a single batch. That the potters responsible were largely Gauls is clear not only from their names, recorded on the many stamped examples of their wares, but also from potsherd graffiti, constituting tally lists and the like, texts that mainly use Latin but are interspersed with Gaulish words; in some cases they are written in Gaulish alone. This was clearly a bilingual community (Adams 2003, 687–724).

Terra sigillata was not the only pottery with mold-made decoration made in Gaul. In the Rhône valley at Saint-Péray above Valence was located the production center of an unusual range of vases, of which a dozen forms are known, that were decorated with mold-made, mostly circular medallions applied to the sides (Desbat and Savay-Guerraz 2011). Most of the pots are goblets or other drinking vessels and have one, two, or three handles. Production lasted for about 150 years, from the Hadrianic period to the later third century, and some products are signed (about a dozen potters' names are known). The iconography used in the medallions is both detailed and varied. Some show mythological scenes, of which the exploits of Hercules are the most popular; others feature divinities, especially "oriental" ones such as Isis and Serapis; imperial propaganda is displayed on others, even straightforward portraits of emperors; the games appear frequently, including gladiatorial combat, and there are depictions of the heart-throb actors of the day, with names like Cupido and Parthenopaeus; and energetic and varied scenes of love-making also form part of the repertoire. The vases provide, in short, a fascinating window into the Gallo-Roman world of contemporary popular culture. Despite their attractiveness they had a comparatively limited distribution, mainly in the Rhône Valley (over 400 examples are known from Lyon) and in Narbonensis more generally, but they also strayed as far north as Cologne and Xanten on the Rhine.

Another distinctive product of central Gaul (but also elsewhere, such as Trier on the Moselle and Cologne) were small-scale pipe-clay figurines, frequently but not exclusively in a white fabric (Bémont, Jeanlin, and Lahanier 1993). The subject matter is very varied, but the main focus is on deities, of which Venus, Mercury, and mother goddesses (often suckling either one or two babies) are the most common; frequent too are depictions of animals. Others again show human figures, including female busts. The presence of molds indicates the locations of some of the production centers, such as Vichy (Allier) and Toulon-sur-Allier in central France,

and Autun in Burgundy. Some of these, or else the products themselves, give their makers' names, such as Tiberius at Toulon-sur-Allier, Pistillus at Autun (Rebourg and Goudineau 2002, 93), and Servandus, Fabricius, Vindex, and others at Cologne (Langer 1994). The figurines probably served mainly as cheap offerings at temples (where finds are common), but they are found also in graves, and some were clearly kept as personal items too.

Glass production was widespread throughout the provinces of the west, and Gaul and Germany were no exception: major centers are attested at Trier and Lyon (where one glassworker is known by name from his funerary inscription—Julius Alexander, an immigrant from Carthage: Ferdière 2011, fig. 29; *CIL* 13.2000). The glass-making center at Cologne, however, stands out for the quality and quantity of its production, which extended from the mid-first century CE down into the fourth, and the variety of the decoration that it attempted (Harden et al. 1987). Mold-blown flasks and bottles inscribed CCAA (an abbreviation of Cologne's full Roman name) put down an early marker, and they were soon joined by other distinctive products of the city's glassworks: vessels with "snake-trailed" decoration applied to the outside of vessels; other vases with more substantial applied ornament, such as fish and dolphins; and wheel-cut and hand-engraved glasses with figured scenes in the third and fourth centuries. The spectacular glass goblet found in 1991 with painted scenes from the life of Achilles of circa 200 CE is almost certainly another product of the local glassworks (Neu 1995); and so too are the three examples of precious "cage cups" (*vasa diatrete*), supreme triumphs of the glass-makers' craft. Despite their fragile nature, Cologne glasses sometimes traveled far afield, to places such as Britain, Denmark, Spain, and Sicily, while one specialist product, its oval glass dishes, got even further, to Ephesus in Asia Minor and to the Black Sea (Höpken 2010, 384, fig. 11).

Wall painting and mosaic

The wall painting that has survived in Gaul and the Germanies, inevitably fragmentary, shows heavy dependence on the Third Pompeian Style (Barbet 2008). There is a repeated fondness throughout the second and third centuries for walls with large central panels, often red, with minimal central decoration, framed by strips in a different color (black is popular) in which the bulk of the decoration, all small-scale, is concentrated. Fanciful candelabra, often with grotesques, or alternatively garlands and other vegetal ornamentation, are prominent, and the low-key decorative elements include Dionysiac figures, cupids picking grapes (there are good examples of both at Cologne: Thomas 1993), and amphitheater spectacles, including gladiatorial combat (as at Liégeaud in central France) or the circus (Pully in Switzerland: Reymond and Broillet-Ramjouié 2001). The high-quality wall paintings from Clos de la Lombarde at Narbonne, especially those of circa 200 CE (Maison à Portiques), are quite unlike anything at Pompeii a century earlier and are unusual even for the rest of Gaul: large figures in the main panels (one with Victory and a *genius* is the best preserved), and side panels with fantasy "stage-set" architecture derivative from the Fourth Pompeian Style. There are a few instances of wall painting, for example at Trier (Schindler 1970, figs. 231–232) and in forts on the German frontier such as Echzell, where panels depicting mythological scenes feature prominently on walls in the Pompeian manner, but they are not common (Baatz 1968;

Süsskind and Wigg 1992, 47). Large-scale all-over compositions are rarer still, but they include scenes in Cologne of *venatores* fighting leopards and tigers, an imposing Venus reclining on her shell from Meßkirch in Baden-Württemberg, and Greek mythological compositions from the villa of Grenzach-Whylen near Basel—the last two no doubt commissioned by estate-owners anxious to show off their classical credentials (Schmidt, Kempa, and Wais 2005, figs. 421, 423). Some ceiling decoration has been reconstructed to good effect, as from the villas at Les Mesnuls near Paris (Barbet 2008, 329) and at Ahrweiler in Germany (Gogräfe 1995), but none surpasses the superlative panels that make up the ceiling of a house at Trier, destroyed by the building of the Constantinian double church in 326 CE (Weber 2000). The scheme consists of 15 square or oblong panels each with a deep blue background, featuring busts of women with *nimbi* (perhaps personifications: [Figure 25.12](#)) as well as “philosophers” and cupids; they are set in a bright red and green framework. The rich polychromy and detail of the clothing and jewelry worn by the finely modeled busts exudes an exotic air of the luxurious lifestyle enjoyed by the wealthy late Roman elite.



Figure 25.12 Trier, ceiling fresco, detail. Römisches Landesmuseum.

Photo: R.J.A. Wilson.

Mosaics in Gaul, as in Spain, were slow to create their own distinctive identity. The earliest floors copy *opus signinum* pavements of the central Mediterranean and then, in the first century CE, the black-and-white mosaics of Italy. Only around the middle of the second century CE did Gaulish mosaicists develop an approach that can be said to be distinctively theirs (Dunbabin

1999, 73–87). Drawing their inspiration from Italian black-and-white geometric floors, they favored a limited number of basic schemata, especially those involving hexagons, octagons, and squares, either singly or in conjunction with one another, and used colour as well as black and white in their compositions. Either floral or geometric ornament or figured scenes occupied the main panels, or a mixture of both, and the intricacy of the geometric patterns surrounding them became over time ever more complex and more colorful. The style probably developed in the Rhône Valley in workshops centered around Lyon and Vienne, where many mosaics of this type are known, but the same style can be seen in southern Gaul, in Switzerland, and in the German provinces as well. Well-known developed examples of this so-called multiple décor type include, for example, the Dionysus mosaic of circa 220 CE in Cologne ([Figure 25.13](#); Bechert 2007, fig. 53), and the floor showing an organist, gladiatorial combat, and arena animals in a large and elaborate floor of circa 225–250 CE in the villa at Nennig in the Saarland. Simpler in its overall scheme (square panels in a grid arrangement), but unusual for the extent and nature of its figured composition, is a mosaic of the early third century from Saint-Romain-en-Gal (a suburb of Vienne). Here every one of its 40 panels showed figured compositions: apart from the four seasons, each depicted a scene from the agricultural year. “All-over” compositions involving figured work from wall to wall are much less common in Gaul and Germany, but notable exceptions include an ambitious marine composition showing boats, buildings, and the transport of amphorae in a villa at Bad Kreuznach in the Rhineland Palatinate (Rupprecht 1986), and a fine hunting mosaic from Lillebonne in Normandy, where every panel contains figured work and the border of each is kept to a minimum (Sennequier 2002; Ferdière 2011, fig. 98). Both mosaics are unusual in being signed. That at Bad Kreuznach names Victorinus as *tessellarius* and is even provided with a consular date (234 CE), itself extremely rare on a mosaic floor; while that at Lillebonne, a pavement without parallel in Gaul in either subject matter or style, names its mosaicist, significantly, as T. Sen[nius?] Felix from Puteoli (Pozzuoli) on the Bay of Naples. The floor probably dates to the fourth century, when mosaicists in northern Gaul were in short supply after the barbarian crises of the third century.



Figure 25.13 Cologne, Dionysus mosaic, detail. Römisch-Germanisches Museum.

Photo: R.J.A. Wilson.

One part of Gaul largely escaped these crises. In southern Aquitania, many large and elaborate villas are known to have made fresh starts in the fourth century, resulting in the creation of gigantic mansions with very many rooms (Balmelle 2001). One of the largest is the villa at Chiragan, southwest of Toulouse, where well over 100 marble sculptures were found in its excavation. Among these were a dozen striking relief panels showing the Labors of Hercules, as well as a number of depictions of divinities and intellectuals emerging from circular *tondi*. Both series as well as other sculptures were, extraordinarily, the creations of itinerant craftsmen from Aphrodisias in Asia Minor, working in the local St. B  at marble from the nearby Pyrenees (Bergmann 1999; Cazes 1999, 73–147; Stirling 2005). No significant mosaics are known from Chiragan, but in other villas in the region where mosaics survive they are almost invariably geometric, or contain rich floral and vegetal decoration in very elaborate and pleasing patterns, quite unlike anything seen in Gaul before. Mosaic workshops continued to be active with repairs and in laying new floors well into the fifth century, a situation unique in the northwestern provinces: villa life of a high standard continued, remarkably, to flourish in Aquitania long after it had been abandoned elsewhere.

Britain

The art of the province of Britannia is striking, not because of its outstanding quality—most must have struck a contemporary visitor from Italy as “provincial”—but because of what it achieved: this was a land where, at the time of the Roman conquest in 43 CE, any tradition of representative sculpture was completely absent (Henig 1995). Although a sophisticated version of pre-Roman La Tène art, especially in metalwork, flourished in Britain before the Roman conquest, it concentrated on linear and abstract designs, anthropomorphic representation being exceptional. With the establishment of the first towns in Britain within a generation of the conquest, at Colchester, London, and St Albans, all of that was to change. In time, such places mutated from being shanty frontier settlements with largely timber buildings and little decoration into fully fledged towns with a complement of highly decorated public buildings in stone, adorned with free-standing statues of stone or bronze. To native Britons all of this was a novelty, a culture shock: the contrast with pre-Roman Britain could hardly have been starker.

One astonishing early example that illustrates, in precocious fashion, the extent of this (normally more gradual) transformation is the palatial residence at Fishbourne near Chichester in Sussex. Erected about 75–80 CE, it has been identified, with good reason, as the final home of the British king, Tiberius Claudius Togidubnus, rewarded for his pro-Roman sympathies with the Roman citizenship and nominal independence for his own “client-kingdom” within the fledgling Roman province (Cunliffe 1998). His influential status, combined with the wealth of the regal coffers, gave him unlimited access to continental architectural and artistic expertise: for the 10-acre Fishbourne palace is a remarkable transplant of a Mediterranean courtyard villa, complete with colonnades, marble veneers, mosaic floors, ambitious fresco and stucco decoration, even marble portraits and formal gardens, into a distant, freshly conquered province. The rooms were paved with black-and-white and polychrome mosaic floors in simple yet striking ornamental designs, undoubtedly laid by imported, probably Gaulish, craftsmen (Cosh and Neal 2009, 530). No later villa in Britain quite matches Fishbourne in either luxury or sheer scale, although that at Woodchester in Gloucestershire comes close to rivaling it in the fourth century. It is also a telling witness of the affectation of Roman culture by leading members of the British aristocratic elite, a process that gradually was to permeate in differing degrees and with varying results through many levels of Romano-British society.

Sculpture

It took time, of course, for British craftsmen to master the new arts introduced from overseas; but it would be wrong to think that all artistic creativity in Britain during Roman times remained at a uniformly low level, and that what to our eyes seems more aesthetically pleasing work must always have been the product of Gaulish or Italian immigrants. Take Romano-British sculpture, for example. By contrast with Mediterranean lands where it is ubiquitous, marble sculpture in Britain—such as two marble portrait busts found in the villa at Lullingstone (Kent), or the fine head of Serapis from the temple of Mithras in London (Toynbee 1964, 59–63, 93–94)—is extremely rare. By contrast, sculpture made in Gaul or by Gauls may have been more common in Britain, but objective identification of such Gaulish work is never easy.

The vast majority of the sculpture found in Britain, however, both in relief and in the round, is likely to have been carved by British craftsmen. All of it looks unsophisticated when set beside the mature products of Roman art from Italy, but that is not the yardstick by which it deserves to be measured; nor would it have been so measured by the Romano-British patrons who commissioned it and paid for it, most of whom would have known little and cared less about artistic standards in Italy. Some Roman sculptures in Britain were more or less closely adapted from Roman models; others betray a continuing fascination with the abstract and curvilinear patterns of the pre-Roman Celtic artistic tradition. The end product varied in quality according to a number of factors, including the nature of the stone, the technical skill of the artist, and both the patron's degree of aspiration to, and the sculptor's knowledge of, the iconography of the classical world. The result was often a fusion between Roman and native traditions, creating an art that can be genuinely said to be "Romano-British," with a vigor and vitality all its own.

An outstanding early example of this meeting of the two traditions is the Temple of Sulis Minerva at Bath. Around the 60s or 70s CE, the monumentalization of the hot spring here had begun with the building of the first bathing establishment, with its great immersion bath and a classical-style temple (Cunliffe and Davenport 1985). The native goddess Sulis to whom the sanctuary was sacred would have had no pre-Roman iconography, so one had to be invented for her; the goddess picked from the Roman pantheon as her nearest equivalent was Minerva. The gilded bronze head of Sulis' cult statue, which by great good fortune has survived, shows her as indistinguishable from Minerva; it is a highly competent provincial rendering entirely in the classical tradition (Toynbee 1962, 135–136). Wholly classical, too, is the idea of relief sculpture in the temple's pediment, the only substantial example known in Britain. The winged victories who hold up the central wreath in the pediment belong to the mainstream of the Roman visual vocabulary; and the choice of the head of the gorgon Medusa at the center is wholly appropriate to Minerva, who regularly featured this apotropaic symbol on her breastplate ([Figure 25.14](#)). However, the Celtic sculptor responsible for carving it—whether he was a Gaul or a Briton does not matter—has turned the female head into a striking male, with craggy face, penetrating gaze, and luxuriant moustache, while the lines on the forehead above the carrot-shaped nose, and the splendid swirling arrangement of the hair, show the Celtic artist's love of abstract patterning. As Jocelyn Toynbee put it, "it represents the perfect marriage of classical standards and traditions with Celtic taste and native inventiveness" (Toynbee 1962, 164).



Figure 25.14 Bath, pedimental sculpture, detail: head of Medusa. Bath, Roman Baths Museum.

Photo: R.J.A. Wilson.

Many other pieces of sculpture, especially from religious contexts, illustrate well this recurrent feature of Romano-British art. The head of Antenociticus, for example, from his little temple at Benwell on Hadrian's Wall, displays in its hairstyle the same Celtic love of patterning as the Bath gorgon; and also decidedly non-classical are the torc worn round his neck and his protruding, diamond-shaped eyes. Yet the whole notion of a three-dimensional sculpted image in stone was an idea imported to Britain from the Mediterranean world (Toynbee 1962, 146).

The shrine of Coventina, a water deity at Carrawburgh, also on Hadrian's Wall, has yielded a relief showing either the goddess in triplicate or three unnamed, identical nymphs, each reclining under an arch with upturned jars of water at their side. Both the columnar framework and the upturned jar represent stock borrowings from classical iconography, but the element of triplism (encountered also in Gaul; see above), and the simple patterned lines of the two-dimensional drapery, belong by contrast to the Celtic world (Toynbee 1962, 153). Or take the tiny silver plaque depicting the warrior god Cocidius from Bewcastle, north of Hadrian's Wall, with stick-like legs, spear, and largely featureless face. Despite the strongly native character of this votive, the god nevertheless stands beneath an arch resting on columns and a single capital (the left-hand one is omitted). So even in a composition as simple as this, vestigial elements are present of the language of Roman architecture, however perfunctorily the craftsman has drawn them (*RIB* 986; Toynbee 1964, 330).

These last three items come from the military zone on the northern frontier, and may well have been the work of soldiers, whom we know in Britain, as all over the Roman Empire, to have been responsible for executing tombstones, altars, votive reliefs, and the like in return for release from less specialized military duties; there is no evidence of a civilian service industry producing such works on contract for the army. Since the auxiliary soldiers who manned the frontiers, for all the exotic-sounding names of the units to which they belonged, were largely recruited from the local British population, such works are good examples of "Romano-British" military sculpture. Tombstones were no doubt their most frequent commission. The example illustrated here ([Figure 25.15](#)) of circa 100 CE, found at Lancaster in 2005, shows the cavalryman Insus, from Trier, triumphantly riding over his barbarian foe (*RIB* 3185; Bull 2007; Iles and Shotter 2009, 68–82). The general design of such cavalry tombstones is common both in Britain and elsewhere in the western provinces, but with variations: both the decapitated head here, and the appearance of a Medusa head at the apex of the pediment, are unique.



D. L. S.
ANNEBVS IN SVS VODVLLI
IVS CIVETREVEREQVESAIAM
VICTORIS CARA FORDOMUA

Figure 25.15 Lancaster, tombstone of Insus. City Museum.

Photo: R.J.A. Wilson.

Also striking is the dramatic sculpture found in 1996 in the river bed at Cramond near Edinburgh, a fort east of the Antonine Wall in Scotland (the short-lived successor of Hadrian's Wall as the northern boundary of the province). A massive piece 1.5 meters long, the sculpture shows a recumbent lioness devouring a bearded man, who wears an understandably glum expression (Hunter and Collard 1997). This is a variant of a common type of tomb sculpture in the northwestern provinces showing lions eating a variety of animal prey. The choice of lioness rather than lion at Cramond, however, is unusual, and the human prey even more so. All clearly symbolize the destructive power of death, and we can be fairly sure that the sculpture once graced, circa 150 CE, a military tomb somewhere nearby. While the hindquarters of the lioness are realistically portrayed, the sketchy carving of her face, with prominent, jagged teeth, and the highly stylized features of her victim, recall expressive pre-Roman Gaulish sculpture, such as the Tarasque of Noves now in Avignon (Pobé 1961, pls. 31–33). Here at this distant outpost on the northern fringes of the Roman Empire, Celtic and Roman funerary symbolism meet in an ambitious, rugged, and powerful work of Romano-British sculpture.

Other crafts

This same admixture of Celtic and Roman traditions can be seen on small-scale items as well. A charming S-shaped copper-alloy brooch type, each end terminating in an animal's head with prominent ears and snout (dubbed “dragonesque” by modern commentators), displays stylized curvilinear forms and the use of brightly colored enamel that are direct borrowings from pre-Roman Celtic metalwork; but chronologically the brooch type does not pre-date the Roman conquest in 43 CE (they were made a few decades either side of 100 CE; Johns 1996, 151–153). Enamel work with curvilinear patterns in the same tradition, and with bold splashes of inlaid reds, blues, and greens, are further striking products of Romano-British craftsmen, applying the skills of their pre-Roman forebears to a range of new and distinctively Roman vessel shapes. Not surprisingly they found a (limited) market overseas, not only in Gaul and Germany, but even as far afield as Sicily. A particular subclass are the half a dozen examples of enamelled copper-alloy skillets that depict Hadrian's Wall schematically, with some of its forts named along the top. The pans appear to have been made in Britain as souvenirs, perhaps for Roman officers at the end of their service on the northern frontier (Künzl 2008; Breeze 2012).

Wall painting and mosaic

Further south, in the civilian heartlands of Britannia, the interior décor of private town houses and country villas, the vast majority of them British owned, presented opportunities for display of their owners' “Roman” credentials. Wall painting in Britain is largely derivative from the Third- and Fourth-Style frescos of Roman Italy. Some have architectural schemes, such as a colorful second-century example from Southwark that used expensive red cinnabar for extra visual effect (even gold leaf was employed in the decoration of this room, probably on the

ceiling: Mackenna and Ling 1991); other wall schemes have panels with a figured element free-floating in the field; theatrical masks occur, as at York and Leicester; and there are even examples of *trompe l'oeil* painting, such as in frescos at Dover, which recall the illusionistic attempts of the Second Style in the first century BCE (Davey and Ling 1981, nos. 14, 22, 52). All-over compositions, so far as is known, were rare, but include a large mythological painting of circa 300 CE from Kingscote in Gloucestershire, possibly depicting Venus posing with the armor of Mars, accompanied by cupids and other deities (Ling 1998).

Mosaics, like painting, owed nothing to pre-Roman traditions, and in time, and especially by the fourth century, Romano-British mosaic, in the hands of competent and inventive craftsmen, sometimes displayed an originality of approach. One workshop based at Corinium (Cirencester) developed a novel way of depicting Orpheus, the mythical figure who charmed animals and birds with his music: it placed Orpheus alone in a central panel, and showed the birds and the animals pacing around him in separate concentric bands (Cosh and Neal 2010, 125–129). The ambitious Woodchester pavement in Gloucestershire, at 14.65 meters square the largest Roman mosaic north of the Alps, is an outstandingly successful example of this scheme, the whole set in an elaborate carpet of ornamental patterns. Intriguingly, some of the geometric designs here are identical to those on a floor at Trier, and so close is the similarity between them that both floors were almost certainly laid by the same craftsmen. Whether this indicates that the Corinium workshop was founded by immigrant mosaicists from Trier, or that the fame of the British mosaicists was such that they were summoned to Trier to work on commission there, is unclear; the former on the whole seems the more likely (Cosh and Neal 2010, 212–223).

The figured mosaics of Roman Britain give us a vivid insight into the tastes of the patrons who commissioned them (Witts 2005). The most common themes were taken from Greco-Roman mythology and literature, intended to display to visitors and guests the owners' education, sophistication, and learning. Of particular interest in this regard is the Latin couplet in the apse of the dining room at the Lullingstone villa, set above a lively mosaic depicting Europa being abducted by Jupiter in the guise of a bull ([Figure 25.16](#)). The inscribed verses were meaningless to any diner who did not know his or her Virgil, since they refer to an episode in the first book of the *Aeneid* (Neal and Cosh 2009, 379–385). Equally, the mosaic from Low Ham in Somerset, with its panels telling the tragic love story of Dido and Aeneas, would again have been instantly familiar to readers of the *Aeneid*. Like most Romano-British floors, the scenes are simply drawn, with bold two-dimensional figures and good use of a limited range of colors (principally red, yellow, blue, and brown), giving a lively, colorful, but not very sophisticated effect to the whole (Cosh and Neal 2005, 253–257).

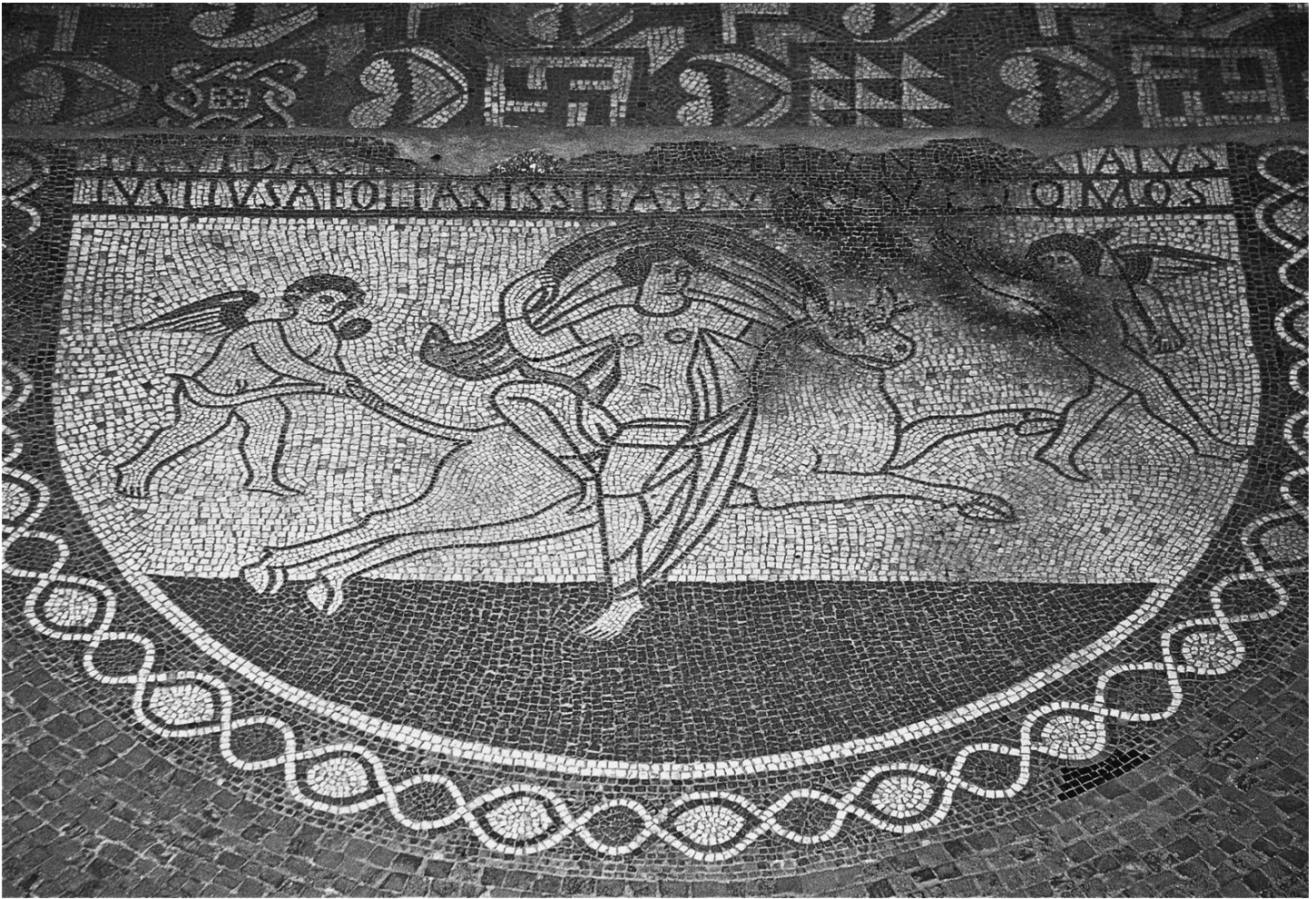


Figure 25.16 Lullingstone, villa, mosaic of Europa and the bull.

Photo: R.J.A. Wilson.

Sometimes, however, the villa owner's aspirations to display his classical erudition exceeded the abilities of his mosaicist. In the extraordinary Venus mosaic from Rudston (Yorkshire), the goddess of love has been transformed into an ill-proportioned, awkwardly posed female likely to win no beauty contests, while an accompanying triton holds up a crudely drawn torch (Neal and Cosh 2002, 353–355). The scenes around are taken from the amphitheater, with animals in each lunette, and unkempt professional hunters (*venatores*) in the spaces between. The figures were based ultimately on a North African mosaic cartoon (one of the animals is accompanied by a crescent on a stick, symbol of an African amphitheater troupe), although it is doubtful whether the Rudston patron or mosaicist understood that. Here we have a splendid illustration not only of the penetration of Roman mythology and iconography to the far north of the province, but also of a local Romano-British mosaicist's attempt to reproduce ambitious classical subjects that severely tested the limits of his technical ability.

The huge fluctuations in output from one region to another, quantitatively and qualitatively, and developments over time within single regions, defy summary or meaningful conclusions. Much basic research remains to be done. Few museums in the western provinces have published detailed handbooks of their collections; even by media we lack systematic catalogues of much of the relevant material. There are notable exceptions, however: the international *Corpus*

Signorum Imperii Romani has provided comprehensive documentation of provincial sculpture for much of Britain and Germany; and corpora of mosaics have covered the whole of Britain, most of Gaul, parts of Spain, and a handful of towns in North Africa. Future research, through painstaking attention to detail and full access to available material, is likely to improve our understanding of working practices and identify more individual workshops of both sculptors and mosaicists. Pottery is the one medium where these are tolerably well known, and distribution patterns established; and it is for pottery too, uniquely, that we know many of the actual production sites. Scientific analysis of stones and marbles should in future help better source the materials used. Above all, fresh finds, some of them stunning, will continue to enlarge the database of material available for study. Each year such discoveries prompt intriguing new questions and pose perplexing fresh puzzles as we try to understand better, in all its complexity, the rich and varied visual culture of the western provinces of the Roman world.

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

There is no systematic account of art in the western Roman provinces available in any language, but the gap may be filled by Sauron 2015 (due also in French and Italian editions). Collections of essays on the visual culture of the provinces (east as well as west) include those edited by Scott and Webster (2003), Noelke (2003), and now Brody and Hoffman (2014). The more substantial books on Roman art refer to artworks from these regions, but usually only fitfully; two of the more systematic attempts are Bianchi Bandinelli (1971, 139–275) and Strong (1980, especially 114–121, 162–169, 214–217, 235–248, 266–267). For individual areas, Africa is treated by Vilímková (1963) and Février (1971), and there is much of value in Romanelli (1970). Spain is best served by Trillmich et al. (1993), an invaluable resource and a visual feast. For Gaul there is Pobé (1961), not least for its album of photographs; the same is true of Eydoux (1962) and, for Germany, Doppelfeld (1974). Britain is better served, with systematic, well-illustrated accounts by Toynbee (1962 and 1964), as well as Henig (1995). For sculpture, Gaul is comprehensively covered by Nerzic (1989). For fresco painting there is Barbet (2008 and 2013) for Gaul and Africa Proconsularis, and Davey and Ling (1981) for Britain. Mosaics in the western provinces are discussed region by region by Dunbabin (1999).

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PART VI
Themes

CHAPTER 26

Contextualizing Roman Art and Nature

Maureen Carroll

The Romans credited themselves with the invention of two forms of visual display that intimately connected art and nature. The first was the development of landscape design (*ars topiaria*) involving the ornamental clipping of plants such as box, cypress, and plane in the shape of animals, figures, and even letters of the alphabet. The art of topiary, although referred to already in the middle of the first century BCE (Cicero, *Letters to Quintus* 3.1.5), was formally developed by a man of equestrian status named Gaius Matius in the latter half of that century (Pliny, *Natural History* 12.6.13). The second invention linking art and nature was the genre of landscape painting. Whether the wall painter Studius first introduced this genre in the Augustan period, as Pliny the Elder claims (*Natural History* 35.37.116–117), or he was the first major figure to develop this style fully, as Ling (1977, 3) suggests, the subjects chosen for his paintings were landscape gardens, groves, woods, hills, coasts, villas, and seascapes, all inhabited by people and animals engaged in various everyday activities.

It is clear from this that the garden itself could be a form of art in its layout and design, as well as in the choice and manipulation of the plants that it contained. This is especially so in the context of domestic architecture, where the garden could act as a setting for sculpture, fountains, and paintings. The Roman house also acted as a canvas for virtual nature, its interiors being adorned with depictions of designed gardens as well as untamed landscapes.

In the following, the archaeological evidence for Roman gardens and the display of works of art in that context are explored. A comparison of real gardens with virtual gardens is attempted, exploring how both might have been seen and experienced by Roman viewers. Rather than focusing on house and villa gardens solely as expressions of status and wealth, I will also consider other possible meanings. Finally, a discussion of the public gardens and parks of Rome as art galleries and museums is warranted.

Roman Gardens

Since the pioneering work of Wilhelmina Jashemski in Campania from the 1960s to the 1980s, a wealth of archaeological, scientific, and visual evidence has been compiled on gardens, groves, and planted spaces in Roman urban and rural locations at Pompeii and in the Vesuvian region (Jashemski 1979 and 1993; Ciarallo and Mariotti Lippi 1993). She excavated large plots of land in and around Roman houses, tavernas, gymnasia, and other establishments, demonstrating that almost every building in Pompeii had one or more gardens when the city was destroyed in the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE. Excavating at rural sites such as Boscoreale and Oplontis, Jashemski revealed the existence not only of modest working farms densely planted with vines, fruit trees, and vegetable gardens, but also luxury villas with

several formal gardens and parks, as well as interior rooms painted from ceiling to floor with garden scenes (Jashemski 1987). We now have a better idea for this region than anywhere else in the Roman world of what types of vegetation grew in a Roman garden in Italy in the first centuries BCE and CE, and how the plants were arranged spatially. Some of these house gardens and villas warrant a closer look, as they will serve as a basis of comparison for a discussion of painted landscapes.

At the Casa del Bracciale d'Oro (VI.17.42) on the western limits of Pompeii, the lower level of the building was taken up by a garden with climbing plants on the long sides of the yard and a central path flanked by box hedges leading to a semi-circular pool at the east end ([Figure 26.1](#); Jashemski 1987, 74–75, figs. 45–50). These hedges were probably clipped, as one would expect in topiary. Just behind the pool was a dining room (*triclinium*; room b) with a marble fountain and paintings and mosaics with a garden theme (Di Pasquale and Paolucci 2007, Cat. 3.B.44). The walls of another dining room adjacent to the *triclinium* also were decorated with scenes of a profusion of garden plants, water features, and sculptures (see what follows). Both rooms opened onto the garden, so that virtual and real garden space blended into each other.

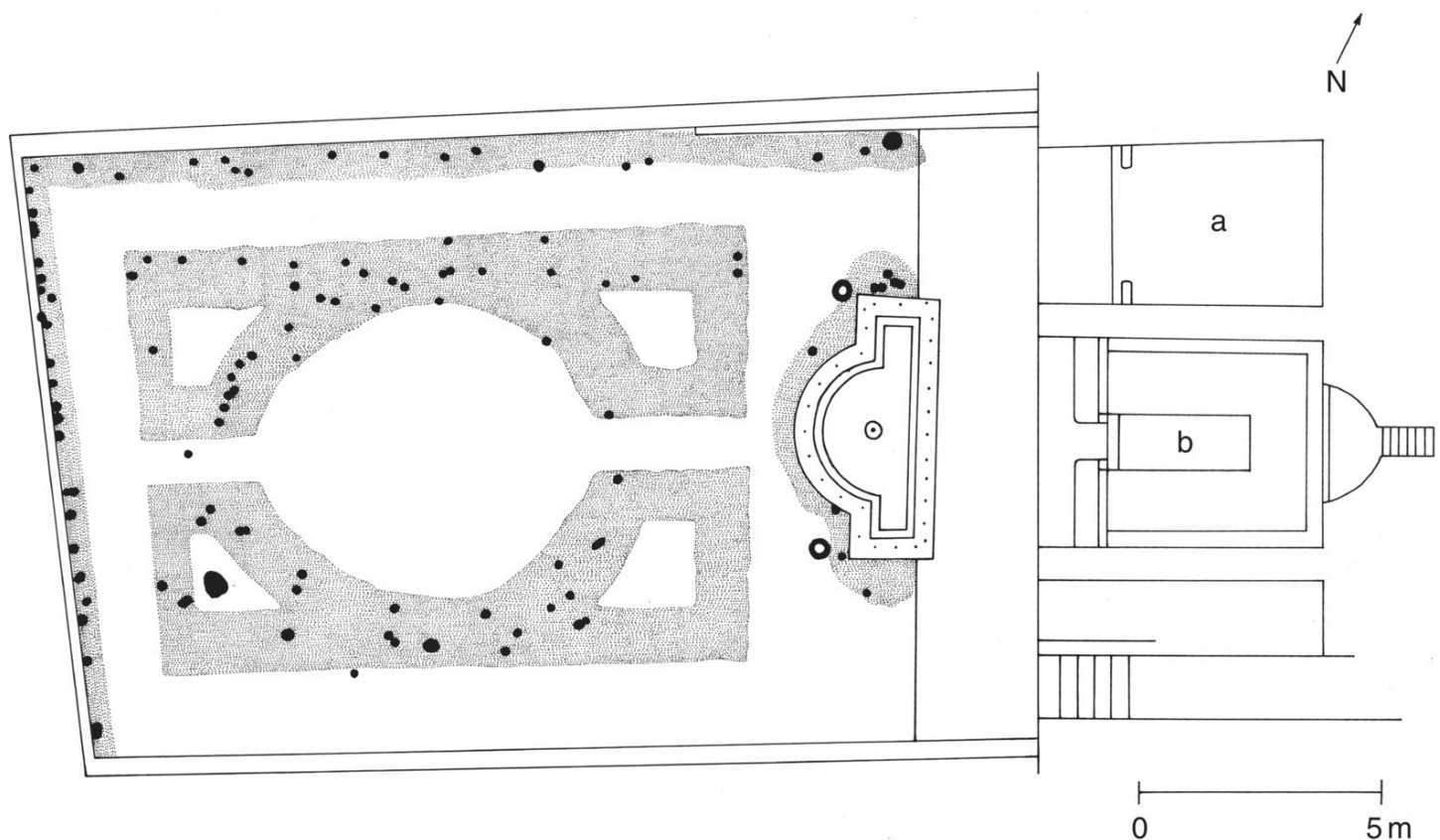


Figure 26.1 Plan of the garden level and adjacent dining rooms, Pompeii, Casa del Bracciale d'Oro (VI.17.2). The black holes represent root cavities, the gray areas are configurations of plants.

Drawing: J. Willmott.

A similar arrangement of raised planting beds, paths, and climbing plants in the courtyard is apparent at the Casa dei Casti Amanti (IX.12.6) on the Via del Abbondanza (Ciarallo 1992,

40–42; Ciarallo and Mariotti Lippi 1993; Bergmann 2008, 56–57, fig. 6). Excavations and botanical analysis have shown that the geometrically arranged beds contained small cypress trees and roses, with shorter plants and a reed fence around the edges. A favourite garden activity is depicted on the wall of a room off the courtyard; in this scene, men and women banquet under the trees and in the shade of an embroidered canopy (Leach 2004, pl. XII; Varone 2007, 139–140, fig. 3).

Careful excavation in the courtyard of the Casa dei Vettii (VI.15.1) in the northern part of Pompeii revealed planting beds in geometric patterns, visible by the heaped mounds of earth in which the plants once grew ([Figure 26.2](#); Jashemski 1979, 35, figs. 54–59). This garden possessed sculptural decoration in marble and bronze, as well as ground-level pipes bringing water from the aqueduct to feed decorative fountains, statues, and marble water basins on pedestals (Di Pasquale and Paolucci 2007, Cat. 3.B.36–43). The garden occupied about a third of the entire space of the building, providing most of the light for the house and creating an area enlivened by the colors and scents of plants and flowers and the sound of babbling water and birdsong. All of this opulence and luxury was immediately visible on entering the house, as the garden lay on the axis of the door and the vestibule.



Figure 26.2 Peristyle garden in Pompeii, Casa dei Vettii (VI. 15.1).

Photo: M. Carroll.

While the house of the Vettii family possessed numerous pieces of sculpture, another Roman house in the same city block in Pompeii was even more richly decorated in the first century CE with statues and reliefs. The Casa degli Amorini Dorati (VI.16.7) had a U-shaped pool in the center of the peristyle garden, and various marble statues, reliefs (*pinakes*) on thin columns as well as marble herms were arranged throughout the garden; many of these had Dionysiac themes (Jashemski 1979, 38–41, figs. 60–67; Di Pasquale and Paolucci 2007, Cat. 3.B.19–35; Mattusch 2008, 72–73, Cat. 73–77). Small marble statuettes of animals and woodland creatures nestled in the vegetation of the planting beds, the juxtaposition of wild nature and the cultured order of the garden manifesting itself clearly. Hanging from the architrave between each column of the peristyle were circular marble plaques or *oscilla* and theater masks of the same material. Although we have no information on the original vegetation in this peristyle garden, it is clear that this particular space formed a focal point for the display of works of art

deemed appropriate in theme for a garden.

Cicero (*Letters to Atticus* 12.25.1) in the first century BCE referred to the luxury villas of the Roman elite around the Bay of Naples as properties of pleasure, and archaeological exploration of these large estates provides valuable evidence for such luxury in landscaping and decoration with sculpture and paintings (D'Arms 1970; Howe 2004; Guidobaldi and Pesando 2007). The Villa Arianna at Stabiae on the Sorrentine peninsula, for example, had a large peristyle courtyard with view of the sea (Jashemski 1993, 308–310). Kathryn Gleason's excavations demonstrate that it was designed with long, raised planting beds and rows of trees and shrubs with walkways or paths between them (Gleason 2010). Hundreds of root cavities of different kinds of small trees, shrubs, and groupings of herbaceous plants have been uncovered in the raised beds, each one laid out differently. Statues or other garden monuments may have been placed in the garden, but the primary focus appears to have been the wide array of displayed plants. In this villa, the garden was to be viewed and experienced from different vantage points, through the windows or from the porticos, or as one strolled along the garden paths.

Investigations at the villa of Poppaea at Oplontis revealed over a dozen gardens, parks, and planted areas in excavated parts of the residence (Jashemski 1979, 289–314; De Caro 1987; Di Pasquale and Paolucci 2007, Cat. 3.B.2–14; Mattusch 2008, Cat. 87–91). At this villa built in the mid-first century BCE, and later enlarged and refurbished, probable box hedges lined the paths in the park to the north, where thickets of oleander and a row of plane trees grew in raised beds ([Figure 26.3](#)). These plantings and paths shaped space and directed the moving visitor across the area, the experience of viewing and moving being enhanced by viewing axes through windows, doors, and gardens within the villa (Bergmann 2002, 99–107). In a large peristyle garden in the southern part of the villa, laurel trees were planted at regular intervals to reflect the rhythm of the portico columns. Forty-five different sculptures, both figural groups and portrait herms, were arranged among the garden plants, the association with art and nature being particularly close on the east side of the swimming pool where a statue stood in front of each oleander, lemon, and plane tree. A large marble bell crater decorated with reliefs functioned as a fountain, possibly at one end of this pool (De Caro 1987, 96–98, fig. 13; Mattusch 2008, Cat. 91). The villa also had a wing of guest rooms connected to each other by tiny, planted courtyards, the courtyard walls being painted with garden vegetation and marble fountains on a gold ground ([Figure 26.4](#)).



Figure 26.3 The north park of the Villa of Poppaea at Oplontis, replanted after Jashemski's excavations (these plantings have since been removed and replaced with others).

Photo: M. Carroll.



Figure 26.4 Garden painting from a suite of rooms in the east wing of the Villa of Poppaea at Oplontis.

Photo: M. Carroll.

After this brief survey of the physical evidence for art and nature in domestic contexts, it is

important to consider what the inspiration for these gardens might have been. The earliest Italic houses of the fourth and third centuries were characterized by a small *hortus* solely for kitchen produce, but after the Roman exposure to Greek private and public architecture and the grand Hellenistic palaces of Greece, Egypt, and Asia Minor in the third and second centuries BCE, domestic architecture in Italy underwent a transformation. Peristyle courtyards were built into Roman houses, but, unlike the peristyle in Greek houses, the Romans embraced this space as one to be landscaped (Carroll-Spillecke 1989 and 1992). The range of images in these green spaces suggests that the inspiration for them came from sites in the Greek world. On the one hand, statues of gods, goddesses, and semi-divine creatures, herms with portraits of gods, votive reliefs, and *pinakes* in the Roman house clearly allude to the sacred realm and are reflections of ancient Greek sanctuary groves filled with votive images and dedications. The Republican poet Albius Tibullus (*Elegies* 3.3.15) referred to such gardens as “plantations that imitate sacred groves.” Public and religious art of the Greek past became private art in Roman villas, although it did not lose its religious and cultic meaning entirely. The images of Greek philosophers, athletes, and Muses, on the other hand, derive from the gymnasia and schools in the suburbs of Greek cities of the classical and Hellenistic periods, particularly Athens. These celebrated institutions attracted many wealthy and educated Romans as places to study Greek philosophy and rhetoric. The archaeological evidence for context and content of Roman gardens, and, as we shall see, the evidence provided by Roman garden paintings and written testimonies of Roman collectors of Greek art, confirm these associations in the perception and design of the Roman garden.

Roman Paintings of Gardens and Landscapes

In the late Republican and early imperial periods, the art of painting walls and panels with garden scenes and landscapes flourished. Three genres of such paintings are discussed in this section: gardens as large-scale murals in interior rooms and along the corridors of peristyle courtyards; the portrayal of architectural settings with enclosed gardens and groves covering the entire walls of interior rooms; and, finally, sacro-idyllic and villa landscapes painted on panels. The first two genres belong to the Second and Third Styles of Roman painting (c. 80–20 BCE and 20 BCE–20 CE), the latter to the Third and Fourth Styles (c. 20 BCE–20 CE and 20–79 CE).

Ars and *natura* were often seen in opposition in ancient art theories, the highest praise generally being reserved for the accurate rendition of nature itself. Playful alterations, unrealistic or fantastic depictions of nature, prompted the architect Vitruvius in the late first century BCE to state simply that “pictures cannot be approved which do not resemble reality” (*On Architecture* 7.5.3–4; Elsner 1995, 51–58). Pliny the Elder in the advanced first century CE was fascinated by naturalism in art, reciting anecdotes of birds being fooled by realistically and naturalistically painted grapes or of horses neighing at a particularly realistic depiction of one of their own (*Natural History* 35.7.23, 35.36.65–66, 35.35.95). The Roman interest in artificial depictions of nature is well illustrated by paintings of the first centuries BCE and CE in elite residences and middle-class houses, both in the capital in Rome and in

Pompeii and its surroundings.

The finest and most beautiful garden murals within an enclosed space adorned an underground dining room at the family estate of the empress Livia at Prima Porta near Rome (Gabriel 1955; Kellum 1994). In this room, decorated around 30–20 BCE, the actual walls appear to be a verdant garden and they dissolve in the dense thickets of vegetation and blue sky above ([Figure 26.5](#)). The line between art and nature is deliberately blurred. The viewer stands in the midst of this garden, separated from it by a dainty reed fence. Behind the fence is a grassy path with bunches of acanthus, ivy, and other plants and various birds, and on each of the four walls, trees (spruces, a pine, and an oak) also grow out of the lawn. The intertwined and dense groupings of flowers, shrubs, and trees in the next plane can be seen behind a low marble balustrade. The vegetation is arranged according to height, so that poppies, daisies, chrysanthemums, roses, and other flowers occupy the foreground, behind which space is taken up by pomegranate, quince and lemon trees, oleander bushes, and palms. More distant, and silhouetted against the blue sky, are laurel trees. Throughout the scene, birds of all manner perch on branches, peck at fruit, or fly through the air. However, this is not simply a reproduction of nature. Different types of vegetation that fruit and flower at different times of year do so all at once in this composition, and all plants are carefully arranged to allow the viewer to see and experience different shapes, colors, and species. There are no humans in the garden, and yet everything is arranged with the viewer in mind. The tame bird in a golden cage on the marble balustrade reminds us that this is a man-made garden landscape, one created by art to go “beyond anything you could find in the real world” (Beard and Henderson 2001, 55). As Carey (2003, 112) notes, nature is subjugated by artifice. The overarching impression is of fertility, harmony, and peace, all qualities inherent to and carefully reflecting the ideology and symbolism of the rule of Augustus (Kellum 1994, 221).



Figure 26.5 Garden painting in the Villa of Livia at Prima Porta.

Photo: M. Carroll.

Roughly contemporary are the garden murals in a large apsed hall in the villa of Maecenas on the Esquiline hill in Rome (Steinby 1996, 70–74). Like Livia’s garden room at Prima Porta, this room was underground, and the inclusion of outdoor garden space in virtual form links them closely. The surviving rectangular hall, the so-called Auditorium of Maecenas, probably functioned as a dining room. The large niches in its walls and in the semi-circular apse at the end are painted to give the illusion of looking out through windows onto the gardens of the estate, catching glimpses of blue sky, shrubs, trees, and flowers with reed fences (Michel 1980, 376–377; Jashemski 1993, 383–385; Paolucci 2007, 73–76, figs. 1–2). Marble fountains of various shapes and birdbaths are arranged on the lawn in front of the fences, some of them very similar to the one we have seen in the swimming pool garden at Oplontis (De Caro 1987, 96–98, fig. 13; Mattusch 2008, Cat. 91). Through the use of external vistas, the walls of this room appear permeable.

Outside Rome, the garden murals that come closest to these can be found in the dining room ([Figure 26.1](#), room a) next to the marble *triclinium* in the Casa del Bracciale d’Oro (VI.17.42) in Pompeii, the decoration dating possibly to the Tiberian period (*PPM* 1991, 44–145; Jashemski 1993, 348–358; De Carolis 2007, 144–147, figs. 3, 5; Bergmann 2008, 58–60, fig. 8, Cat. 65). This dining room opens out onto the real garden, and its walls are painted to give the illusion of being in another part of that garden ([Figure 26.6](#)). At the back, laurels are silhouetted against a blue sky; closer to the viewer are medium-sized plants such as dwarf plane trees, oleanders, and viburnum bushes, while ivy, daisies, lilies, roses, poppies, short palms, and arbutus bushes grow behind a reed fence in the immediate foreground. Birds of various species populate the bushes and plants. Bubbling marble fountains and birdbaths, marble herms, and painted *pinakes* with Dionysiac imagery are arranged throughout the garden. Dangling above are round *oscilla* and theater masks. A whole range of Egyptian statues, sphinxes, and Egyptian-themed *pinakes* decorate the painted garden in this room and the neighboring *triclinium*, such motifs reflecting the popularity of Egyptian exotica following the conquest of Egypt and its incorporation into the Empire in 31 BCE (Knauer 1993, 13–18; Swetnam-Burland 2007).



Figure 26.6 Garden painting in a dining room, Pompeii, Casa del Bracciale D'Oro (VI.17.2).

Photo: Samuel Magal, Sites & Photos Ltd./The Bridgeman Art Library.

In one of the bedrooms (*cubiculum* H) in the Casa del Frutteto (I.9.5) at Pompeii, the depicted garden is filled with even more works of sculpture (Michel 1980: 386–390; PPM 1990, 1–137; Jashemski 1993, 317–322; De Carolis 2007, 143–144, figs. 1, 2). Trees such as oleander, cherry, and lemon are depicted behind a trellis fence. On every wall of the garden paintings, Egyptian statuettes are arranged in the foreground, and marble *oscilla*, theater masks, and garlands are suspended above the tops of the trees. In a second bedroom (*cubiculum* I), naturalistic fruit trees behind a wall appear to be lit up against a black night sky. In both *cubicula*, the garden is articulated by very thin, upright pillars, so that vegetation and fantasy architecture share the same walls. The garden here in the mid-first century CE no longer appears to continue off into the distance, as it did at Prima Porta.

While garden murals such as these could transform the interior room of a house into a virtual garden, they could also be deployed in the immediate vicinity of a real outdoor garden to

optically enlarge or add depth to the planted area. In the garden in the House of Venus Marina (II.3.3), for example, the whole back wall of the planted peristyle was decorated with murals of garden vegetation and sculpture on either side of a panel of Venus on a seashell ([Figure 26.7](#); Jashemski 1979, 63–66; Carey 2003, 128–131; Bergmann 2008, 65–67, figs. 13–15). On entering this space, the viewer could take in a garden instantly that manifests itself both in *ars* and in *natura*. Garden shrubs and plants grow behind a trellis fence, and in the foreground of one scene is a white marble statue of Mars on a pedestal and, in the other, a white marble fountain filled with sparkling water. The play between art and nature is further enhanced by the presence of a (painted) bird which is tricked into pecking at the berries growing on the ivy frames of both paintings as if they were real. As this example demonstrates, the Romans delighted not only in the imitation of nature, but also the playful juxtaposition of reality and artifice that invited the viewer to recognize the trickery for what it was. Another favorite location for painted garden plants were the walkways or corridors leading to real gardens, as if the paintings were to prepare the viewer for the plantings that he or she would encounter outdoors ([Figure 26.8](#)).

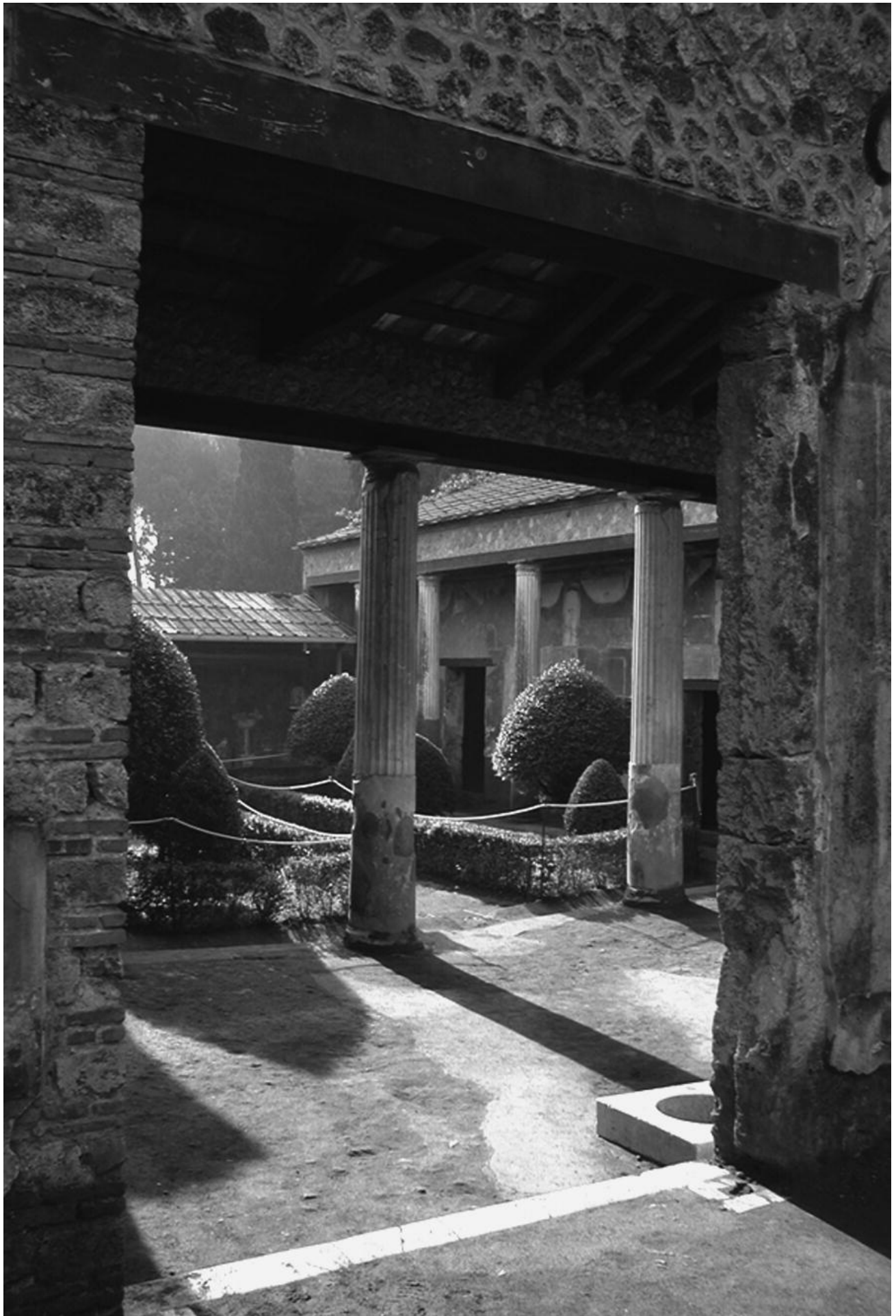


Figure 26.7 Peristyle garden with garden murals in the House of Venus Marina (Pompeii II.3.3).

Photo: M. Carroll.



Figure 26.8 Painting of garden plants and birds behind a trellis fence in a corridor leading to the swimming pool garden in the villa of Poppaea at Oplontis.

Photo: M. Carroll.

Another genre in landscape painting consists of murals in which architectural vistas are glimpsed through portals or beyond a wall. Of particularly high quality are the paintings in Poppaea's villa at Oplontis, painted shortly after the middle of the first century BCE (Jashemski 1979, 289–314, and 1993, 375–379; Leach 2004, 75–79). Similar scenes executed about 40–30 BCE decorated the walls of several rooms in the villa of P. Fannius Synistor in nearby Boscoreale (Williams Lehmann 1953; Bergmann 2010). Although these images are reminiscent of the *scenae* of the-aters, the symbolism of cult statues, votive columns, altars, garlands, and incense burners point to the sanctified nature of the space beyond. The large tripod in the midst of grand colonnades and trees in the *triclinium* at Oplontis, for example, leaves no doubt that a sanctuary to Apollo is portrayed ([Figure 26.9](#); Leach 2004, 78, fig. 57).

These compositions affording the viewer glimpses of trees and votive monuments through the columns of porticos are immediately relevant to the archaeological evidence for the sacred groves of Roman temples. Recent excavations at the sanctuary of Venus in Pompeii, for example, have shown that this temple of the mid-first century BCE stood in a sacred grove consisting of rows of trees on three sides of the temple, the grove in turn being enveloped by porticos on the edges of the precinct (Carroll 2008 and 2010). The design of landscaped temple precincts continued to be employed well into the third century CE. The so-called East temple in Thuburbo Maius in Tunisia and the temple of Elagabal on the Palatine in Rome, for example, were laid out with rows of trees flanking or framing the temple (Jashemski 1995, 573, figs. 13–14; Villedieu 2001a and b; G. Rizzo 2001).



Figure 26.9 Wall painting depicting a sanctuary and grove of Apollo in the Villa of Poppaea at Oplontis.

Photo: M. Carroll.

The sacred sphere is also seen in a third genre of Roman frescos, in so-called sacro-idyllic landscapes. Unlike the garden murals and temple complexes that covered the entire wall, these landscape “panels” imitating framed paintings do not dominate, but are only a small part of the overall decorative scheme. Some of the most beautiful examples can be found in the imperial

villa of Augustus' friend and son-in-law Agrippa at Boscotrecase (von Blanckenhagen and Alexander 1990). In the Black Room of this villa, small landscape vignettes float in the middle of monochrome panels, each one executed in an exquisite and impressionistic, even sketchy fashion. Rural shrines consisting of a few remains of ruined buildings, a tower, or a votive column are located on rocky outcrops, a few gnarled trees casting a little shade on the tiny figures of humans and animals moving around in and around the sanctuary. These possibly represent the style of paintings attributed to Studius, as discussed in the introduction. There is no attempt to create real depth or the illusion of imaginary views out of the room onto adjacent landscapes; this Third Style of Roman painting acknowledged the two-dimensionality of the walls on which these paintings were executed.

Related to these Third-Style paintings in their small size are the vignettes of villa landscapes typical of Fourth-Style painting. Like the earlier Second-Style garden murals seen at Livia's villa at Prima Porta or in the Casa del Bracciale d'Oro at Pompeii, these villa landscapes correspond very well to the archaeological evidence for villa gardens. Beautiful villa vignettes are preserved in many houses and villas in the Vesuvian region ([Figure 26.10](#); Camardo 2004, Cat. 4, figs. pp. 27, 31; Mattusch 2008, Cat. 2–3). These virtual villa gardens consist of rectangular planting beds, paths, and pools, all elements of real garden landscaping that we have seen, for example, at the luxury villas in Campania. In fact, the large peristyle garden in the seaside Villa San Marco at Stabiae, with its rectangular, central pool and double rows of plane trees surrounded by the colonnades, could almost be taken from or have inspired a contemporary wall painting (Barbet and Miniero 1999; Barbet 2004).

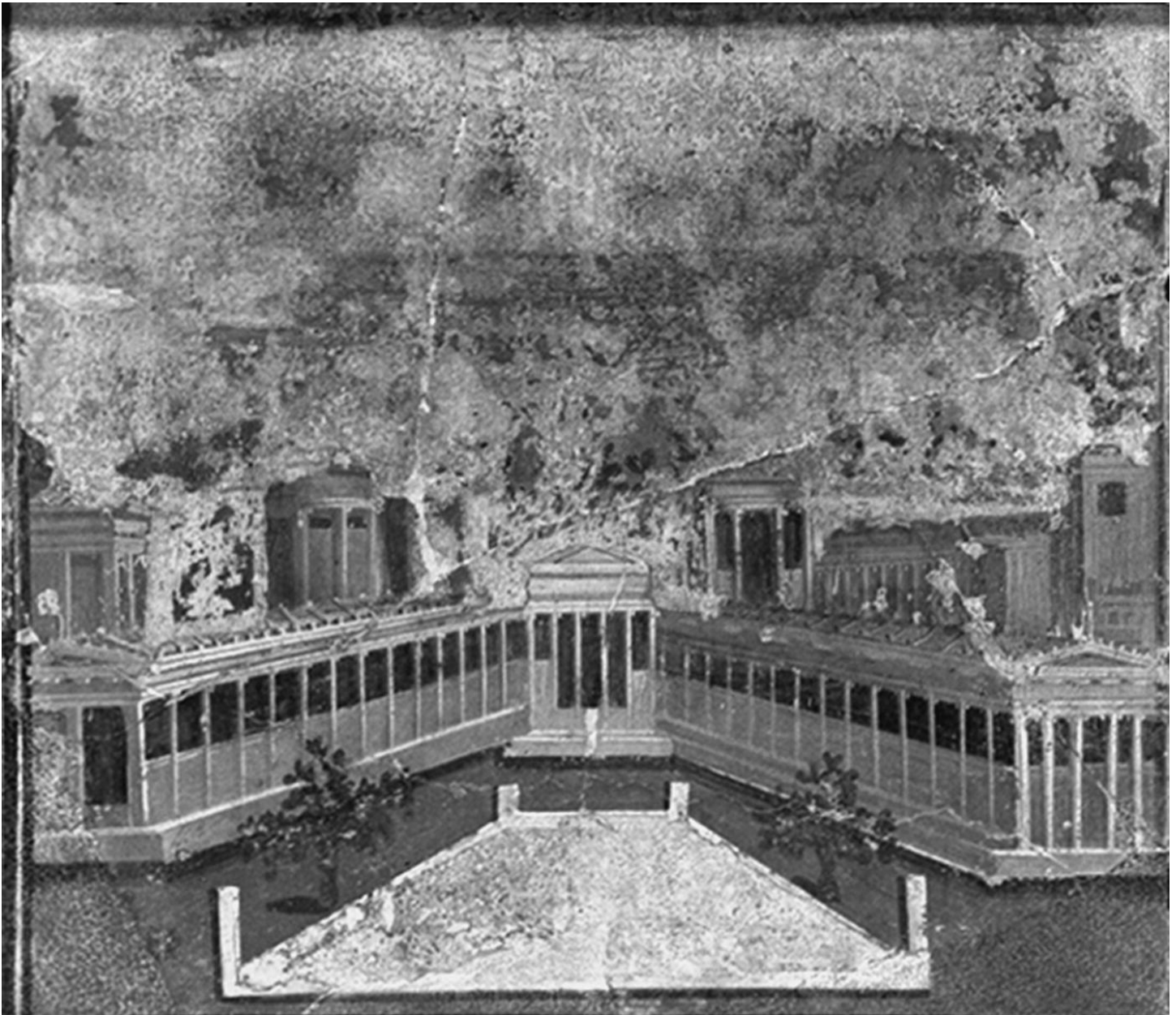


Figure 26.10 Grand Roman villas and gardens in wall painting from Pompeii, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples.

Photo: Archivio dell'Arte, Luciano Pedicini.

The Experience of Real and Virtual Gardens

Pliny the Younger's descriptions of his Tuscan and Laurentine villas and their surroundings in his *Letters* required the ancient reader to imagine landscapes, perspectives, and spatial relationships (Bergmann 1995; von Stackelberg 2009, 125–134). In his letter to Domitius Apollinaris, he asks his friend to picture the landscape of his Tuscan villa and the complex of buildings and gardens that he is about to describe (*Letters* 5.6). Artifice and the skills of the *topiarius* are praised in Pliny's description of his hippodrome. The variety of the plantings and the different vantage points from which to view the complex are reminiscent of the planting beds of different designs and the pathways recently excavated at the Villa Arianna at Stabiae:

Having passed through these several winding alleys, you enter a straight walk, which breaks out into a variety of others, partitioned off by box-row hedges. In one place you have a little meadow, in another the box is cut in a thousand different forms, sometimes into letters, expressing the master's name, sometimes the artificer's, whilst here and there rise little obelisks with fruit-trees alternately intermixed.

As Pliny states, these owed their beauty to art.

Pliny's villa on the coast at Laurentum near Ostia is a seaside villa, and his description in his letter to Gallus returns repeatedly to views of the sea from his many windows, as well as "the coast, and the beautiful villas scattered along the shore line" (*Letters* 2.17). At this villa, a spacious dining room looked out on a garden with walkways bordered by hedges of box and rosemary and flanked by a shady climbing vine. In front of the garden was a terrace of which Pliny not only enjoyed the sight, but also the smell, as it was "fragrant with the scent of violets." Nowhere does Pliny describe statues, sculpture, or a collection of art in his villas or gardens, but he writes of a summerhouse in his Tuscan villa "enclosing a small area shaded by four plane-trees, in the midst of which rises a marble fountain which gently plays upon the roots of the plane-trees and upon the grass-plots underneath them." Another room in the villa has marble paneling and garden paintings with birds among the branches of the foliage, clearly one of those garden rooms whose walls are disguised by the painted garden, as we have already seen.

Pliny's descriptions of his surroundings appeal to all the senses. There is the sense of movement in descending a terrace, the sound of water gushing through pipes in a marble *triclinium* fountain, the perception of temperature with breezes cooling and sun warming the rooms, and the sense of touch at walking along a garden path so soft "that you may walk bare-foot upon it" (*Letters* 2.17). His descriptions invite the reader to experience everything by imagining the scenes unfolding, something that anyone familiar with the appearance and spatial layout of Roman villas and gardens should have been able to do. Moreover, Pliny's descriptions of the landscape in which his Tuscan villa was located allude to the perfection of the situation:

You would be charmed by taking a view of this country from the top of one of our neighbouring mountains, and would fancy that not a real, but some imaginary landscape, painted by the most exquisite pencil, lay before you, such an harmonious variety of beautiful objects meets the eye, whichever way it turns.

(*Letters* 5.6)

Pliny's contemporaries would have known to what kind of painted landscapes and villa scenes he was referring.

One of the most interesting surviving texts for understanding how the ancient viewer might have seen and experienced paintings of landscapes and gardens is the *Imagines* of Philostratos (Lehmann-Hartleben 1941; Elsner 1995, 23–39). In this text, Philostratos describes 64 panel paintings in the elite Neapolitan home of his host, narrating them vividly before an audience of young men as an exercise in how to interpret paintings and to appreciate what is esteemed in

them. For Philostratos, painting is imitation by the use of colors and light and shade, an art form able to capture human figures as well as “houses and groves and mountains and springs and the air that envelops them all” (*Imagines* 1.1). Realism and imitation of nature are most highly praised: “I was deluded by the painting into thinking that the figures were not painted but were real beings. ... I shout at them as though they could hear and I imagine that I hear some response” (*Imagines* 1.28).

Like Pliny’s appreciation of his landscaped villas, viewing painted landscapes and nature was a sensual experience. Philostratos praises the delicate and dewy look of roses in one of the paintings, claiming that “they are painted fragrance and all” (*Imagines* 1.2). He asks his audience if they caught anything of the fragrance hovering over the depiction of a garden (*Imagines* 1.6), and he instructs them often to listen carefully when they might hear things such as “herds of cattle lowing, and the music of the shepherd’s pipes” echoing in their ears (*Imagines* 1.12). Not only scents and sounds are imagined, but also the movement of people, animals, and vegetation. In his description of a painting of a marsh, for example, Philostratos writes that “in the midst of the pool amaranth flowers are nodding this way and that, sweet clusters that pelt the water with their blossoms” (*Imagines* 1.9). This is pure interpretation of static images, but the Roman eye did not see them as static. Virtual nature could behave like real nature, if the imagination could see beyond the artifice.

Gardens as Art Galleries

From the middle of the first century BCE, leading aristocrats and emperors transformed the appearance of the Empire’s capital by building large, colonnaded precincts in which groves and gardens were laid out. Pompey the Great brought back living trees from his eastern campaigns—the balsam from Judaea, the Ethiopian palm, the Asiatic plane—and paraded them as “captives” in his triumphal procession in Rome in 61 BCE (Pliny, *Natural History* 12.20.20, 12.54.111–112). Contemporary descriptions of the magnificent *porticus* that he built and dedicated in 55 BCE in the capital reveal that the open space within the colonnades was planted with rows of plane trees where one could stroll and admire fountains, statues, and famous Greek paintings in the shady gardens and the porticos hung with a canopy of woven gold cloth (Ovid, *Art of Love*, 3.387; Propertius, *Elegies*, 2.32.20; Martial, *Epigrams* 2.14.10; Pliny, *Natural History* 35.34.59; Kuttner 1999). Gleason (1994) rightly calls this the “first public park of Rome.”

More than a century later, the emperor Vespasian built his temple of Peace (*Templum Pacis*, or *Forum Pacis*) in the heart of Rome to celebrate the conquest of Judaea in 70 CE.

Contemporary written accounts of this complex and recent archaeological evidence confirm that the *Templum Pacis* was lavishly adorned with gardens and sculptures, making it a combination of botanical garden and open-air museum (La Rocca 2001, 196–207; Meneghini 2006, 159). Josephus (*Jewish War* 7.5.7) highlights the beauty and scope of this art gallery: “He also adorned it with paintings and statues by the greatest of the old masters. In fact, in that temple were collected and deposited all those works that men had hitherto travelled over the whole world to see, longing to set eyes on them even when scattered in different lands.”

Suetonius (*Life of Vespasian* 18) tells us that Vespasian also displayed masterpieces of Greek art, including the Venus of Kos by the fifth-century master sculptor Praxiteles. Many celebrated works of art looted from Greece and Asia Minor had been kept by the emperor Nero in his private palace, the Domus Aurea, Vespasian subsequently moving them to his *Templum Pacis* where the enjoyment of these pieces was no longer a prerogative only of the imperial house (Pliny, *Natural History* 34.19.84). Recent archaeological exploration of the *Templum Pacis* has revealed more fragments of statue bases with inscriptions referring to statues by Athenian sculptors such as Praxiteles, Kephisodotos, and Parthenokles, as well as fragmentary bronze and marble statues of Greek philosophers (La Rocca 2001, 197–201; Meneghini and Santangeli Valenzani 2007, 66, figs. 606–661). Furthermore, these excavations have demonstrated clearly that landscape architects designed the open courtyard with rows of long, marble-clad water basins and planted it with the red *Rosa gallica* (S. Rizzo 2001, 238–239). An analysis of the soil in amphorae used as plant pots confirms the presence of remains of this plant, but it is not unlikely that other kinds of shrubs and trees, possibly highly symbolic exotica from Vespasian's campaigns in Judaea, were planted here as well (Macaulay-Lewis 2008, 212–217; Pollard 2009). Paintings and probably many statues were displayed in the porticos surrounding the courtyard, but some of the sculptures were arranged in the open courtyard in conjunction with the vegetation and water elements (Meneghini and Santangeli Valenzani 2007, 68).

The collection and display of Greek art in a landscaped setting were certainly not limited to the public sector. In fact, the most enthusiastic collectors of ancient art in the late Republic were the elite and fabulously wealthy families who took over the suburbs of Rome for their vast private villas and parks (*horti*; Cima and La Rocca 1998; Liverani 2007; Paolucci 2007; von Stackelberg 2009, 74–80). The gardens of the very wealthy historian and contemporary of Julius Caesar, C. Sallustius Crispus, for example, were situated on the Pincian hill in the northwestern part of Rome, and they contained various buildings, pavilions, and fountains as well as groves, gardens, and parks (Steinby 1996, 79–81; Hartswick 2004; Liverani 2007, 91–92; Piranomonte 2007). Many famous works of ancient sculpture from public and sacred spaces in the Greek world were prominent features of the *Horti Sallustiani*, including Greek mythological sculptures of the sixth and fifth centuries BCE as well as marble copies of dying Gauls, the famous bronze statues set up in the third century BCE in Pergamon by king Attalos I to celebrate their defeat (Germini 2008, 124–147).

Even more associated with luxury were the *Horti Luculliani*, also on the Pincian hill, which belonged to L. Licinius Lucullus (Steinby 1996, 67–70; Liverani 2007, 90–91; Germini 2008, 147–160). These gardens, laid out around 60 BCE, were influential for all subsequent elite and imperial estates around the capital. Plutarch (*Lucullus* 39) considered the *horti* of Lucullus, with their sumptuous buildings, porticos, and baths, too extravagant; his paintings and sculpture “he collected with vast expense, lavishly bestowing all the wealth and treasure which he got in the war upon them, insomuch that even now, with all the advance of luxury, the Lucullan gardens are counted the noblest the emperor has.” Lucullus also brought back cherry trees from the Black Sea as spoils from his eastern campaigns, and introduced the species to Italy, probably in his own *horti* (Pliny, *Natural History* 15.30.102).

For insight into the shipment of art from Greece and the eastern Mediterranean for wealthy patrons and collectors in Roman Italy, the ships that sank with their cargos off the North African coast at Mahdia and off the Greek island of Antikythera around or shortly after 80 BCE are of particular value (Hellenkemper Salies 1994; Weinberg et al. 1965). The cargos reflect the themes of the sanctuary and the schools of philosophy associated with the gymnasium. These included statues, statuettes, and reliefs depicting gods and mythical beings, Greek athletes, Greek philosophers, satyrs, and herms. Some of the pieces belong to the classical period, while others are copies manufactured in the first century BCE for the Roman art market (Fuchs 1959; Grassinger 1991; Ridgway 2002, 226–240). There is little doubt that many of the pieces on these ships were destined for the villas and gardens of wealthy, cultivated Romans in Italy (Carroll-Spillecke 1994).

One of the most avid Italian collectors of Greek art, Cicero, wrote numerous letters to his friend Atticus in Athens, requesting him to locate and purchase originals and copies suitable for Cicero's villas and gardens. In 67 BCE, Cicero (*Letters to Atticus* 1.8) wrote to his friend:

I have paid L. Cincius the 20,400 sesterces for the statues from Megara in accordance with your letter to me. As to your herms of Pentelic marble with bronze heads, about which you wrote to me—I have fallen in love with them on the spot. So pray send both them and the statues, and anything else that may appear to you to suit the place ... above all, anything you think appropriate to a gymnasium and terrace.

Cicero recognized the appropriateness of objects to create the desired atmosphere; he recreated “a school like the Greeks” at his villa at Tusculum and wanted sculpture appropriate to a gymnasium setting, where he could experience leisure or *otium* of an intellectual and physical sort (*Tusculan Disputations* 1.4). Other elite patrons in Italy shared Cicero's passion for Greek art, both original pieces and copies (Bartman 1991; Beard 2008). The existence of 19 replicas of a statue group of a satyr and a hermaphrodite, one of which was placed in the garden next to the swimming pool at Poppaea's villa at Oplontis, illuminates the supply and demand of the Roman market in Greek art (De Caro 1987, 98–100, figs. 15–16; Di Pasquale and Paolucci 2007, Cat. 3.B.14; Mattusch 2008: Cat. 90).

Although himself a collector, Cicero accused the provincial governor Gaius Verres of art theft, claiming that he “carried off by force some of the most beautiful statues from Chios” and other sites in the eastern Mediterranean (*Against Verres* 2.1.49–51). Cicero, in the same court speech for the prosecution, demanded to know where the plundered paintings and statues from Samos had gone: “I mean those which I lately saw in your house against every pillar, and also in every space between two pillars, and actually arranged in the grove in the open air?” In reality, Verres had behaved no differently than any other wealthy and cultivated Roman, including Cicero, who could afford to purchase or purloin coveted works of Greek art for their personal enjoyment and prestige in their villas, porticos, and gardens.

This investigation of planted spaces known through archaeological exploration, of the depiction of gardens, plants, and sculpture in painting, and the role of art in landscaped precincts and estates, has confirmed that the ancient Romans took pleasure not only in the nature around them, but also in the effective juxtaposition of reality and artifice.

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

The groundbreaking work on the archaeology of Roman gardens and landscaped spaces was conducted in Campania at sites around Vesuvius from the 1970s (Jashemski 1979, 1987, and 1993; Ciarallo 1992; Ciarallo and Mariotti Lippi 1993). More recent approaches to gardens in the context of houses and villas (von Stackelberg 2009), sacred precincts (Carroll 2008 and 2010), and public parks (Gleason 1994; Kuttner 1999) have looked at spatial analysis, elements of status, and landscape design. Discussions of the sculpture in domestic gardens can be found in De Caro (1987), while imperial villa gardens (*horti*) around Rome and their sculptural ensembles are the focus of various papers in Cima and La Rocca (1998) and Hartswick (2004).

Excavated Roman wall paintings depicting gardens and landscapes, particularly those found at Pompeii and other sites in the Vesuvian region, were catalogued by Jashemski (1979) and studied by Michel (1980) and De Carolis (2007). Other garden paintings of high quality in and near Rome, such as those at Livia's villa at Prima Porta, have prompted in-depth studies on patronage, style, and naturalism (Gabriel 1955; Kellum 1994). A survey and analysis of painted landscape depictions in the Roman provinces is lacking. Bergmann (2002 and 2008) critically examined the combination of real and virtual nature in the context of the Roman house in Campania, but there is much more scope for this kind of analysis elsewhere in Italy and beyond.

Roman treatises on landscape painting were once discussed primarily as a literary genre (Lehmann-Hartleben 1941), and it was not until later that these written descriptions were related to extant Roman paintings (Ling 1977) and explored in the context of ancient art theories (Elsner 1995). Finally, Bergmann (1995) explored the visualization and experience of other landscapes described in literature, particularly those of Pliny the Younger's villa gardens.

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CHAPTER 27

Roman Art and Spectacle

Zahra Newby

Spectacle culture was a defining feature of the Roman world. From Britain to Syria or North Africa, public entertainments were part of the benefits of membership in the Roman Empire, attested through the building of theaters and amphitheaters, as well as in inscriptions, graffiti, and all forms of visual art. In this chapter I will trace the impact that this culture had on Roman art, exploring the reasons why patrons were eager to buy and commission such images, and what they can tell us about Roman culture and society. First, I offer a brief outline of what such spectacles included. They broadly fall into four groups: gladiatorial contests and wild beast hunts; chariot racing; theatrical performances; and athletic competitions. The origins of these groups differed: chariot racing and theatrical performances formed part of ancient Roman *ludi*, games performed as part of the celebrations for the festivals of the gods, while gladiatorial contests had originated as funeral games honoring members of the elite, although they later become more general occasions for displays of generosity by individual members of the elite and, later, the emperor. Some athletic contests such as wrestling and boxing formed part of the early Roman games, but the full Greek athletic program was only introduced to Rome in the first century CE as part of the Greek-style festivals introduced by Nero and Domitian (the Neronian and Capitoline Games). By the second century CE Rome was host to a multitude of different forms of games and spectacles, to the extent that the emperor Marcus Aurelius had to take action to preserve two-thirds of the year for business (*Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, *Marcus Aurelius* 10). Towns around the Empire enjoyed similar spectacles, often funded through the generosity of local elites. In the eastern provinces Greek festival culture continued to thrive, along with the introduction of Roman-style gladiatorial contests, while western provinces first adopted traditional Roman games and then, in time, Greek-style festivals, too.

Images of spectacles and entertainments in art vary from the roughly sketched records of gladiatorial contests that we find on Pompeian walls, to small mementos such as vases, lamps, and terracotta or bronze figurines, to larger representations of various spectacles in the form of paintings, architectural reliefs, and, especially, floor mosaics. The wealth of this imagery cannot be fully covered in this short chapter and instead I will aim to illustrate some of its richness through a series of examples. In this way I will show the impact that the games had in a wide range of contexts, looking at how art was used to express the passions of the audience or the cultural ambitions of wealthy home owners, as well as the self-representation of performers, donors, and individual cities.

Theatrical Spectacles from Pompeii to Antioch

Imagery from the theater is widespread across the Roman world. Ranging from simple scenes of actors on lamps to the depiction of theatrical masks in paintings, mosaics, or sarcophagi and

more detailed scenes of individual performances, these images have often been studied for what they can tell us about the nature of Roman theater and performance (Bieber 1961). Here, however, I want to focus on what they tell us about the interests and concerns of those who commissioned, bought, or viewed them.

The first point to note is that theatrical imagery may have had a wide range of referents, not all of them easy to identify (Green 1994, 142–171; Bergmann 1999, 10–16). A scene where the figures are dressed in costume with masks, sometimes with identifying labels, advertises itself as a scene of theatrical performance. Yet it is often not clear whether this alludes to a contemporary production or is simply a copy of an earlier work, without allusion to contemporary theater. Theatrical performances encompassed a wide range of genres, from traditional tragedy and comedy (old plays in Greek and Latin versions as well as new works) to the reworking of old stories in the form of mimes and pantomimes (the ancient use of these terms differed strikingly from our own: mimes were comic parodies, whereas pantomime involved a silent dancer acting out the roles of various mythological characters to musical accompaniment). Audiences could also enjoy a series of other spectacular entertainments such as juggling and acrobatics (Denard 2007). While comedy, tragedy, and the pantomime made use of traditional masks and costume, performers in other spectacles such as the mime did not, and thus may not be as easily recognizable in the visual arts. Images of theatrical masks can also have a broad range of associations, from specific links to the theater and performance in some images to a more general association with education and culture, as when they are held by the Muses on Roman sarcophagi.

A selection of images evokes the performance of particular plays, most particularly Menander's comedies. These span periods and places from late second-century BCE Pompeii to late antique Mytilene (Webster 1995, 1, 85–98). The earliest are two mosaics in *opus vermiculatum* (a very fine form of mosaic work) signed by Dioscurides of Samos, which were inserted into the floors of the so-called Villa of Cicero at Pompeii (Dunbabin 1999, 44–47, figs. 44–45, dated to c. 100 BCE). While the scenes here are unnamed, comparison with the later representations from a House in Mytilene identify them as scenes from Menander's *Breakfasting Women* (*Synaristosai*) and *Possessed Girl* (*Theophoroumene*; [Figure 27.1](#)). The Mytilene mosaics decorated the floors of a triclinium and peristyle in a lavish third- or fourth-century house (Charitonides, Kahil, and Ginouvès 1970; Dunbabin 1999, 217, figs. 228–230). In the triclinium the panels form part of a T shape, covering the area around which the diners were placed, with the panels oriented to their viewpoint ([Figure 27.2](#)). A portrait of the playwright Menander starts the series on the top row, followed by representations of the play *Plokion* (*Necklace*), a scene of Simmias, Socrates, and Kebes that evokes Plato's *Phaedo*, and a portrait of the muse of comedy, Thalia. The stem of the T is made up of six panels showing scenes from different plays by Menander, with the name of the play, act number, and characters all identified by inscriptions. Four more scenes from Menander's comedies appear in the panels of the peristyle. More labeled scenes of Menander's comedies, this time the *Rape of the Locks* (*Perikeiromene*) and *Sikyonians*, appeared painted on the walls of a house in Ephesos, probably dating to the late second century CE. Here they were interspersed with scenes from tragedies, with Orestes (sic) and Iphigenia identified by name (Strocka 1977, 45–56, figs. 62–

69).



Figure 27.1 Mosaic signed by Dioscurides from the “Villa of Cicero,” Pompeii. Naples, Museo Archeologico inv. 9985.

Photo: Soprintendenza per i beni archeologici di Napoli e Pompei; courtesy of R. Ling.



Figure 27.2 Reconstruction of the triclinium mosaic from the House of Menander, Mytilene.

Photo: By permission of E. Csapo and *Antike Kunst*.

All of these images represent scenes from famous plays, yet their meaning for original patrons and viewers may have been very different. In the Pompeii panels the scenes are not identified, although the mosaicist is, and the works are of superlative quality. While viewers would recognize from the masks that these were scenes of the performance of a comedy, they would not necessarily have identified the actual plays. They could read the fact that these were the work of a Samian mosaicist, imported into the house to show the cultural predilections of its owner. They might have formed a talking point, allowing the host to point out the actual plays represented and to retell the story of how he came to acquire them. While viewers may have compared the scenes to contemporary performances, the main impact of these panels was

probably aesthetic, evoking awe at the detail of the work and admiration for the host's display of his cultural knowledge. This was embodied in both the form and the content of the mosaics, in their nature as works of art by an eastern craftsman that most likely copied an earlier painting as well as in their subject matter, reflecting the plays of the most famous Greek comedian.

The images from Ephesus and Mytilene may have evoked different responses. While here too scholars have suggested a derivation from earlier models, the use of inscriptions to identify the plays performed, and, in Mytilene, the precise act and names of the characters, makes the reference to actual performances much stronger. They were displayed in homes in the eastern Mediterranean, an area that was proud to assert its Greek cultural heritage, and thus tap into a shared cultural background on the part of both host and guests. The Mytilene mosaics are placed in the area in front of guests, where theatrical performances (including the works of Menander) as well as singing and dancing often took place (Plutarch, *Tabletalk*, 7, 8; Jones 1991, esp. 192–193). We cannot know whether these particular scenes evoked actual performances within the house or those in the theater, but in their detail and number they suggest a vibrancy in theatrical culture, an enduring interest in Menander's comedies, and the shared literary culture of both the host and his guests (with different emphasis see Csapo 2010, 140–167).

Other forms of theatrical performances may have been evoked by a number of other mosaics from the eastern provinces (Huskinson 2003). On one mosaic from Antioch, a scene recognized as showing Iphigenia in Aulis is shown in front of a lavish architectural background reminiscent of the Roman *scaenae frons* (Levi 1947, 119–126). While the backdrop looks theatrical, none of the characters wears a mask. Nearby, the House of Dionysus and Ariadne at Seleucia contained a suite of two rooms opening off a peristyle (Levi 1947, 141–156). In the triclinium a mosaic shows a lavish architrave with projecting columns, beneath which is a scene of Dionysus approaching the sleeping Ariadne. On either side stand the subsidiary figures of a maenad and a satyr. The latter is dressed in the long woolly costume typical of the satyr play, lending a theatrical note to the scene. It is possible that this and the Iphigenia mosaic evoked the performance of traditional myths, either in public or within the house itself, perhaps in the form of pantomime (although masks are not shown here). In the House of Dionysus and Ariadne, the columns of the architrave echo the real architecture of the room, where diners looked out onto the peristyle beyond. This was decorated with panels showing dancing maenads and satyrs, as well as a scene of Perseus liberating Andromache. All of these scenes can be read simply as references to Greek mythology, the common culture of the eastern Mediterranean, but they might also have evoked theatrical tableaux on these subjects. The staging of mythological events was certainly popular in public, as is suggested by Apuleius' account of a staged version of the Judgment of Paris in the theater at Corinth (*Metamorphoses* 10.29–35), as well as at private dinner parties.

The difficulties of identifying the range of associations that a mosaic may have had are shown by the case of a few mosaics from ancient Syria portraying figures otherwise known from the ancient Greek novels (Quet 1992; Newby 2007, 199–202). The House of the Man of Letters at Daphne near Antioch contained two mosaics, one with the figures labeled as Metiochos and

Parthenope, the other showing a reclining male figure approached by a woman. A similar mosaic from nearby Alexandretta labels the man Ninos, suggesting an identification with the Assyrian king who featured in a contemporary novel concerning his love for his cousin Semiramis (Levi 1944). Metiochos and Parthenope reappear in a different composition in a mosaic from Zeugma. Both pairs of couples featured in ancient novels, now known only in fragments, but they also appear in Lucian's list of the themes performed by pantomime, a form of theater that was very popular in ancient Antioch (*On the Dance* 1.54; *False Critic* 25). Do the mosaics refer to performances of these stories in the theater, private retellings or performances of the tales in the home, or knowledge of the novels themselves? The Metiochos and Parthenope mosaic from Daphne shows the figures gesticulating in a manner that would befit a theatrical performance, but the other mosaics show the participants seated or reclining, perhaps evoking the symposium during which they were viewed (Csapo in Campbell and Ergeç 1998, 124–127). A whole range of responses might have been elicited from the images, alluding to public theater or private performance as well as more generally to the host and his guests' knowledge of these tales, one of which (Ninus) dealt with the distant history of this very region. While many such images could have had specific references to performance, they also acted more broadly to convey the shared education (*paideia*) of a host and his guests, a common cultural knowledge that could bring together the elites of a widespread empire (Lancha 1997; Leader-Newby 2004, 123–171).

The Sporting Heroes of Italy: Gladiators, Athletes, and Charioteers

Panem et circenses.

(Juvenal, *Satire*, 10.81)

In Juvenal's characterization of the Roman plebs, he says that they are passionate for two things above all, bread and circuses. This love of the circus is shown through an abundance of visual imagery as well as in numerous stories about the passions evoked by loyalty to the various different factions. Individual charioteers (and their horses) could attain great fame and wealth, despite their officially low status in Roman society. A similar story can be told of gladiators, records of whose fights were scratched into walls as well as appearing on commemorative monuments such as tombs. The Roman passion for athletic contests is less well known; while past scholars relied on elite literary sources that speak disparagingly of the pernicious effects of Greek-style athletics, the visual evidence tells another story, often celebrating famous individual athletes as well as attesting to a keenness to adopt athletic pursuits within the Roman baths.

Numerous literary sources attest to the popularity of gladiators, from Juvenal's scathing remarks about their female fans to Petronius' characterization of Trimalchio as a devotee of gladiators (Juvenal, *Satire* 6.82–115; Petronius, *Satyricon* 29.52). The visual record is also full of representations of gladiators, on small items like lamps, vases, and knives as well as in mosaics and wall paintings. A number of these include the name of the gladiator, and

sometimes record specific contests giving the past record of each combatant as well as the outcome of a particular match. Some of these scenes adorned tombs (discussed later), where they could record the shows funded by particular individuals, yet in other cases they attest to the personal enthusiasm of an individual. This is particularly the case with graffiti, such as a series of scenes scratched onto a tomb outside the Nuceria Gate at Pompeii (Jacobelli 2003, 50–52, fig. 43). These showed a series of contests that had recently taken place at Nola. The first is a contest between a leading gladiator and his rival, to the accompaniment of horn players. Two other images show contests featuring one Marcus Attilius, a newcomer, who is shown defeating two veterans of the arena, Hilarus and Raedius Felix. Details such as the gladiators' names and records of their past victories and fate in these particular matches provide vivid evidence of the popularity of the arena.

Graffiti are an informal, ephemeral art form, but gladiators were also commemorated in more permanent form. Some were so famous that they find an echo in works with a variety of provenances. A glass vase found in Hungary shows the fights of the gladiators Petraites and Prudes; the same pair were depicted in a painting outside a building in Pompeii (now lost), where they were inscribed Tetraites and Prudes (Jacobelli 2003, 79, figs. 65a–b). Another vase found in Britain shows a scene of charioteers in the upper register, with the gladiators Petraites and Hermes below ([Figure 27.3](#); *RIB* 2429.18; see also *RIB* 2419.19, 26, 32). Petraites seems to have had a wide following, even appearing in Petronius' fictional account of the wealthy freedman Trimalchio's lavish dinner party, where Trimalchio boasts of owning silver cups decorated with his fights (*Satyricon* 52).

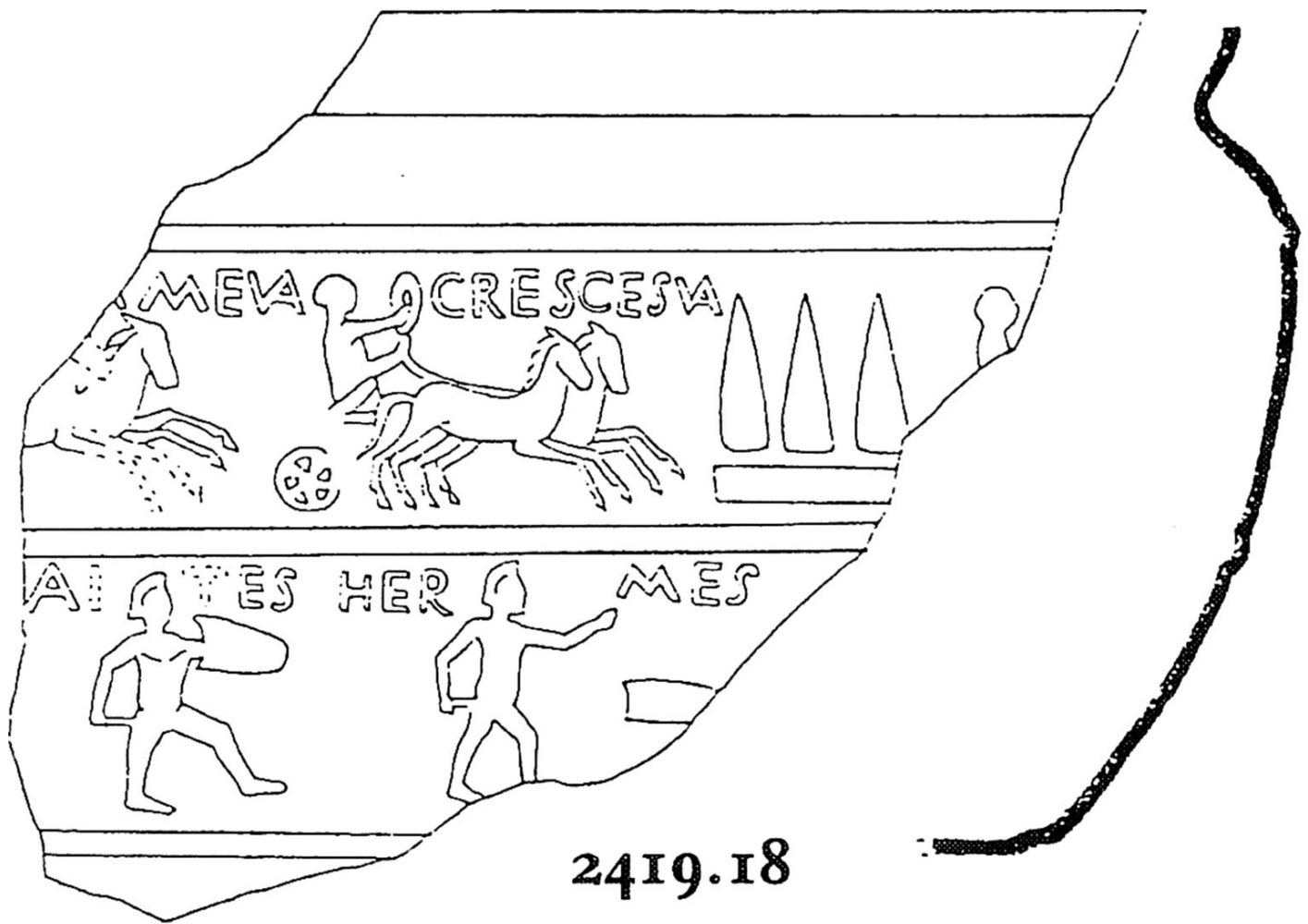


Figure 27.3 Drawing of vase with circus and gladiatorial scenes. After: *RIB* 2419.18 (D. B. Harden), by permission of the Haverfield Trustees.

A century or so later, athletes are shown receiving the same kind of popular recognition in the mosaics from ancient Ostia. The majority of the mosaics featuring athletic scenes are found in bath complexes, where they resonated with the exercises of the patrons of the baths, exalting their efforts through the implicit comparison with contemporary athletic victors. Many were not individualized by name, but in some cases it is clear that particular contemporary figures are being celebrated (Newby 2002 and 2005, 45–87).

The Inn of Alexander Helix at Ostia was paved with a black-and-white mosaic representing a number of scenes scattered across the floor. In addition to a scene of a naked Venus admiring herself in a mirror accompanied by Cupid and a pair of stick-dancers is a scene of two athletes with their fists raised ([Figure 27.4](#)). Between them is a victory palm. They are labeled above as Alexander and Helix and can be confidently identified with two leading athletes of the early third century CE, Aurelius Alexander and Aurelius Helix (Jones 1999). Helix was victor in the 218 CE Capitoline games at Rome, while Alexander later held the position of chief priest of the athletic synod, based in Rome. The mosaic may allude to a specific contest between the two men, or to an imagined confrontation between two leading specialists in the pancration (a contest combining the skills of boxing and wrestling). It is possible that the other images on the

mosaic may also have evoked public spectacles and entertainments: the prominent phallus worn by one of the stick-dancers looks like the costume worn by a comic dancer (Dunbabin 2004, 165), while the naked Venus may reflect the popularity of mimes on mythological subjects featuring scantily clad female performers. The placement of the images in an inn clearly celebrates the popular entertainments enjoyed by the people of Ostia, while the presence of two named athletes attests to the fame that could be attained by performers from across the Empire.



Figure 27.4 Alexander Helix mosaic, Ostia. Photo: Archivio Fotografico della Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma e Ostia.

A later mosaic in Ostia similarly celebrates individual victors, this time in the chariot race. It decorates a heated room in a bath complex in the so-called Palazzo Imperiale, an extensive establishment whose original purpose is unclear. The mosaic shows six victorious charioteers dressed in traditional costume and holding victory palms and prize crowns (Scrinari 1988). All are named, along with another name in the ablative, presumably that of the leading horse of their chariot. Similar celebrations of victorious charioteers reappear across the empire (Dunbabin 1982). They date particularly from the third and fourth centuries CE, a time when chariot racing gained the greatest heights of popularity. Their appearance in this complex at Ostia may simply be a record of the popularity of particular individual charioteers, or could be

a more specific reference to a particular set of games held in Ostia; one suggestion is that the complex served as the headquarters for the quaestor of Ostia and that the mosaic reflects the events of the *ludi castorum*, which are attested as being held in Ostia in the third and fourth centuries CE (Scrinari 1988, 188).

Commemorating the Games: Private Passions and Public Munificence

Many of the surviving representations of spectacles come from private houses and tombs. In some cases they seem to record particular events sponsored by the patron or deceased, while in other cases they may allude more generally to his interests and wealth. I will look here at the evidence from tomb reliefs in Italy and mosaics from North Africa. The dating and material of these images vary, but all suggest the importance of spectacles as a locus for displays of public munificence as well as the expression of personal pleasures.

In the mid-first century CE, a wealthy freedman from Teate Marrucinorum (modern Chieti, on the east coast of Italy) built a tomb for himself and his two wives. Inscriptions from the complex name him as C. Lusius Storax, a *sevir augustalis*, a prestigious magistracy open to wealthy freedmen. These men were responsible for organizing sacrifices and games in their city, a role that is proudly celebrated on Storax's own funerary monument. The reliefs from the tomb consist of a long frieze decorated with gladiatorial contests and a pedimental relief that presumably sat above it ([Figures 27.5](#), 11.3; Clarke 2003, 145–152). The pediment relief shows a prominent seated togate figure surrounded by other men in togas. It shows Storax in his role as *sevir*, his right arm raised in a gesture that suggests he is about to start the games that he has funded. The four officials to either side of him are probably senior magistrates of the city, while those behind represent other leading men of the city. To left and right of this central scene are groups of horn players who would have accompanied the gladiatorial contests and the procession beforehand. As a whole, the reliefs assert Storax's status as a leading man in his community and celebrate his generous provision of gladiatorial games. The fact that it is these that are celebrated on his tomb shows the importance of the games as part of the glue binding together all members of society in a shared culture, and as a key locus in which wealthy members of the society could rise to prominence at the same time as asserting their generosity to their own communities (Veyne 1990; Lomas and Cornell 2003).



Figure 27.5 Reliefs from the Tomb of Lusius Storax. Chieti, Museo Archeologico Nazionale.

Photo: Hützel, Neg. D-DAI-Rom 62.1068.

Representations of the games appear on a number of other tombs from cities around Italy. A relief from Pompeii now in the Museo Nazionale at Naples depicts three super-imposed friezes: a procession in the upper register, gladiatorial contests in the largest central section, and wild beast hunts at the bottom, all probably part of a spectacle funded by the deceased whose tomb it decorated (Jacobelli 2003, 95–97, fig. 77). Such friezes often seem to celebrate the public acts of those they commemorated, although in some cases they may also have alluded to the tastes and interests of the deceased. The wealthy freedman Trimalchio's plans for his tomb (Petronius, *Satyricon* 71) provide an interesting fictional parallel. Trimalchio requests images of ships in full sail and himself sitting in official dress giving a donation of money to the people; these are clearly meant to be records of Trimalchio's own career. However, when describing his portrait statue, Trimalchio also asks for images of a dog at his feet, flowers, perfume, and "all the fights of Petraites," the gladiator whose fights also adorned his silverware (*Satyricon* 52). Rather than being a record of games specifically funded by Trimalchio, these scenes reflect his personal interests, designed to bring comfort to him in death (Clarke 2003, 185–187).

The tomb of Vestorius Priscus in Pompeii also includes depictions of gladiatorial contests as part of its decoration (Clarke 2003, 187–203). Here they were painted within the enclosure wall of the tomb, visible to visiting relatives rather than to the average passer-by. The inscription tells us that this was the tomb of C. Vestorius Priscus, aedile, who lived to the age of 22. Money for his funeral and a place for his tomb were granted to him by the city decurions, while his mother, Mulvia Prisca, paid for the tomb itself. The imagery on the tomb chamber attests to Priscus' public office, showing him seated on a *sella curialis* and surrounded by men in togas. The other walls show him standing in his tablinum, and a banquet

scene, alluding to his status as paterfamilias of his household and as a generous host. The inner walls of the enclosure wall add other resonances. A lavish display of silverware suggests his wealth and taste, while scenes of gladiators appear on the west wall. There is no record in the inscription of Priscus having funded such a show; the images here may reflect his own tastes and interests, as in Trimalchio's request for gladiators on his tomb. However, in her desire to present Priscus, young though he was, as an important citizen, his mother may also have included these scenes as a suggestion of the sorts of spectacles he would have gone on to fund, if he had not been cut down in his prime.

These Italian tomb monuments show the importance of recording the generosity of individual magistrates, as well as suggesting the deceased's own passions during his lifetime. Elsewhere, similar statements of public generosity and private pleasures were expressed within the domestic realm. There is a particular abundance of spectacle imagery in the mosaics from Roman North Africa, the majority of them dating from the third and fourth centuries CE (Dunbabin 1978, 46–108). The clearest example of a mosaic being used to recall an actual example of generosity is the Magerius mosaic from Smirat, which shows four venatores attacking leopards with the hunters and beasts all named ([Figure 14.4](#) and Ling, [Chapter 14](#), this volume; Dunbabin 1978, 67–70; Leader-Newby 2007, 184–186; Bomgardner 2009). In the center of the mosaic a herald is shown carrying a tray of moneybags, flanked by two lengthy inscriptions that repeat an appeal for the venatores to be paid and the crowd's subsequent acclamation of the generosity of Magerius, the giver of this set of games. Magerius himself may be represented in the figure at the top right corner of the mosaic, now partially lost, while the crowd's acclamations are also shown in two inscriptions naming him (in the vocative, Mageri). The archaeological context of the mosaic is uncertain, but it seems most likely to have been commissioned to decorate Magerius' own house, as a permanent record of his generosity to his local community.

Plentiful other mosaics similarly display imagery from the arena or circus. On many, the men or animals who took part in the games are given name labels, providing an added sense of authenticity. In these cases specific shows may be referred to, possibly indicating the generosity of a particular individual. In other cases, however, we cannot know whether one specific occasion is being alluded to, and the mosaics may have been chosen rather to reflect the host's own passions and communicate with his guests. North Africa's spectacle culture is well attested through the provision of amphitheaters, such as that at El Djem, but it also provided many of the animals that were displayed in spectacles at Rome. Scenes of hunting and wild beasts may thus reflect also a sense of provincial pride at their key role in Rome's spectacle culture, and a sense of membership in the wider Roman Empire.

Civic Culture: Images of the Games in Public Art

Local and regional identities seem also to have motivated the display of performance imagery on public buildings throughout the Empire, especially those that were actually used during public festivals and spectacles. One of the clearest examples is the first-story frieze of the theater at Hierapolis, a small town in Phrygia, in the province of Asia. The theater was built at

the start of the third century CE, and adorned with a lavishly decorated *scaenae frons* (Ritti 1985; D'Andria and Ritti 1985; Newby 2005, 246–252). Friezes along the back of the stage commemorated Hierapolis' patron god, Apollo, alongside his more famous sister, Artemis of Ephesos. On the first story above the *porta regia*, the frieze showed the town's most important festival in honor of Apollo, called the Pythia, with the reigning emperor Septimius Severus in attendance (Ritti 1985, 57–77; Newby 2005, figs. 8.10, 8.11). The central section shows the emperor and his family, next to a large table bearing a prize crown attended by a personification of the city itself and two more personifications, symbolizing Agon (competition) and Agonothesia (the presidency of the games). The side reliefs display a number of other personifications, identified by inscriptions as Sunthusia (joint sacrifice), Oikoumene (inhabited world), and Aion (time), as well as Andreia (courage) and Sunodos (the guild of actors). The reliefs also include scenes of victorious athletes being crowned.

The message of the reliefs as a whole is a proud celebration of Hierapolis' civic festival, proclaiming its equality with the Pythian games (a mark of prestige awarded to certain festivals in the Roman period) and stressing its influence both geographically and chronologically. The presence of athletes and the personification of the Synodos indicates that both athletic and musical contests were included in the festival, some probably occurring within the theater itself. Traditional religious festivals were one of the means by which cities in the Greek eastern half of the Empire continued to express their Greek cultural identity, as well as vying for prestige and imperial attention. The decision to represent this scene on Hierapolis' theater shows the central place that festivals and their spectacles played within the creation and expression of civic identity and self-representation.

The theater at Hierapolis records a particular festival, and links it to the patronage of the imperial family of the day. The uniting of politics, religion, and spectacle reappears again on the theater at Sabratha in Libya, whose reliefs date to the same period (Caputo 1959). Here a series of reliefs decorates the front of the stage itself, arranged in a series of curved and rectangular niches. In the central curved exedra the personifications of Roma and Sabratha clasp hands, surrounded by figures in military dress and flanked by two scenes of sacrifice; while the faces are eroded, one appears to be that of the emperor Septimius Severus himself, accompanied by his son Caracalla (Caputo 1959, 19). The relief asserts the unity between Sabratha and Rome, and the city's place within the wider Empire. Around this central scene the other reliefs show the spectacles and events that took place here. The rectangular recesses either side of the central scene contain theatrical scenes. To the right, two tragic actors perform a play about Heracles (one holds a club), while at the left a scene without masks shows a confrontation between an old and a young man watched by a seated woman, probably a scene from a comic mime. Further out, the curved exedrae include the Muses holding their various attributes, on the left, and on the right a scene of the Judgment of Paris, accompanied by the three graces ([Figure 27.6](#)). This may well represent a theatrical masque, staged in the theater, such as that described in Apuleius *Metamorphoses* (10. 29–35). The recess at the far right of the stage shows a comic or tragicomic scene with the actors wearing masks, while to the far left is a scene perhaps showing a competition in recitation, as a series of young men approach an older seated teacher.



Figure 27.6 Relief showing the Judgment of Paris decorating the theater at Sabratha.

Photo: Sichtermann, Neg. D-DAI-Rom 58.458.

These scenes alluding to the delights of the theater in its broadest form are presided over at the center by the figures of Rome and Sabratha. While the central relief declares unity and loyalty, the surrounding ones show the delights of empire, the entertainments and leisure that are only made possible by stable imperial rule. It is possible that here, as at Hierapolis, a particular festival or set of games is alluded to. However, the variety shown (tragedy and comedy as well as mime and recitation) suggests a wider set of referents, to all the occasions for enjoyment that the theater offered and that were part and parcel of Sabratha's membership of the Empire.

My final focus in this section are two mosaics from the city of Patras in mainland Greece, a Roman colony that enjoyed both Greek- and Roman-style entertainments. While they could be attacked by elite literary sources as being un-Greek (Dio Chrysostom, *Orations*, 31, 121; Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 4.22), Roman gladiatorial contests were in practice adopted with enthusiasm across the Greek-speaking provinces, performed as part of the festivals of the imperial cult, as well as through individual acts of euergetism (Robert 1940). Given that Patras was a Roman colony, it is not surprising to find there plentiful evidence of gladiatorial contests; in addition to reliefs and funerary stelai, these include a mosaic showing a contest of two gladiators found within a Roman house (Papapostolou 1989, esp. 393–401). One of the two gladiators is named as Kallimorphos, a figure who reappears on a funerary relief from Patras (Rizakis 1984, no. 8), while the umpire in charge is named as Teimocrates. As with the mosaics from North Africa discussed earlier, the names give a sense of authenticity, suggesting that this contest might have formed part of a spectacle sponsored (or at

least enjoyed) by the master of the house.

From roughly the same period, the late second to early third centuries CE, comes another mosaic from Patras, although the original context in which it was displayed is unfortunately lost (Waywell 1979, 301, no. 38; Dunbabin 1999, 216). It is a large mosaic (6.6 by 2.5 meters), divided into two registers. The upper one shows tragic actors, musicians, and a chorus around a prize table, while the lower shows a series of athletes, including the runners in a torch race and a race in armor, boxers, wrestlers, and victors with wreaths. The clear impression is of the various contests that formed part of a Greek-style festival, including both athletic and musical contests. An inscription from Laodicea in Syria honoring the athlete Aurelius Septimius Eirenaios lists among his victories two in boxing and running at Patras (Moretti 1953, 249–253 no. 85). It is dated to 221 CE and thus provides a clear indication of the existence of at least one athletic festival in Patras around the time the mosaic was commissioned. The size and proportions of the mosaic suggest that it paved a long, narrow space, perhaps a public portico or stoa, although we cannot be certain. If in a private dwelling, it could have commemorated the generosity of a leading citizen and magistrate for helping to fund the festival; if in a public building, it acted like the reliefs on the theater at Hierapolis, to advertise the vibrant festival culture of the town. Together, the two mosaics show two sides of Patras' entertainment culture and wider civic identity; by enjoying both Roman and Greek-style festivals and entertainments, the city could celebrate its dual identity, as a Roman colony founded in the heart of the Greek mainland.

Memorializing the Dead: Celebrations of Individual Performers

So far we have looked at how visual imagery attests to the Roman public's delight in all forms of spectacle, to elite pride in their acts of generosity, and at how images of the games could act as part of a dialogue about civic identity, the benefits of empire, and the shared cultural *paideia* binding together figures from a broad geographical background. Yet, all these images were commissioned or bought by the consumers of the ancient games; by the spectators and those who funded or hosted the games. What about the performers themselves?

Roman literary sources often seem ambivalent about those who took part in public spectacles, commenting on the infamy of performing in public and, in legal terms at least, equating gladiators, actors, or charioteers with the lowest of the low. Yet at the same time, some of these individuals were able to accrue vast fortunes, mingling with the highest levels of society. Funerary and honorific monuments from across the Empire commemorate all sorts of performers, from athletes and gladiators to actors and charioteers, attesting to the wealth and success that some could achieve and to a sense of pride in their professions. Perhaps the most extreme example is the impressive tomb monument erected by the successful charioteer P. Aelius Gutta Calpurnianus just outside the Porta Flaminia at Rome in the mid second century CE (Nash 1981, 2.308). The tomb has been destroyed, but its inscriptions were recorded in the eighth century (*CIL* VI 10047) and some of the reliefs were found reused in the nearby Porta

Flaminia ([Figure 27.7](#)). They show three racing chariots that probably decorated the front of the tomb, while the inscription celebrated his total number of victories: 1,127 (Meijer 2010, 89–90). In its size, decoration, and inscription, this monument is a proud celebration of a long and successful career.



Figure 27.7 Relief from the Tomb of the charioteer Gutta Calpurnianus, Rome. Musei Capitolini, Museo Nuovo Capitolino, inv. 2244.

Photo: Fototeca Unione, American Academy in Rome FU 1151.

Conclusions

The images discussed here are just a small selection of the wealth of imagery relating to public spectacles that was produced in the Roman world. In addition to expensive and high-quality works in relief or mosaic, numerous cheaper representations on vases, figurines, or graffiti also attested to the popularity of the games. All of these images can be used to reconstruct details—such as the armor of different sorts of gladiators, or the types of masks worn in performance—but they also introduce us to wider issues relating to Roman culture and society. They suggest the spread of Roman spectacle culture across the Empire, and also variations between the popularity of particular events in different periods and places. Thus, the preference for scenes of hunting and the arena on the mosaics of North Africa and, conversely, for mythological scenes in the eastern Mediterranean may partly reflect the entertainment tastes of those regions. These images could also be used to assert senses of civic identity and elite munificence, as well as the personal passions of their owners. They allow us a glimpse of what mattered to the inhabitants of the Roman world, and of the ways in which the visual arts facilitated communication between people of varied social and regional backgrounds.

The abundance of the material offers scope for much future research. Dunbabin's forthcoming book will undoubtedly make a major contribution to the field, but is also likely to identify other new areas to explore within public, funerary, and domestic contexts. These might range from further study of the representation of civic festivals in public art, as a means of civic self-representation, to the disputed question of the significance of spectacle imagery in funerary art. Spectacle imagery infused all areas of Roman life and its analysis helps us to understand the pleasures and concerns of the Romans themselves.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

The literature on spectacles is extensive and full bibliographies can be found in the works cited here; the articles in Christesen and Kyle (2014) provide useful overviews. Selected accounts on individual spectacles include Hopkins (1983, 1–30), Wiedemann (1992), Hopkins and Beard (2005), and Welch (2007) on the arena; Beacham (1991), Denard (2007), and Hall and Wyles (2008) on theater; Cameron (1976) and Meijer (2010) on circus games; Thuillier (1996), König (2005), and Newby (2005) on athletics. The wide range of representations of spectacles in art is best illustrated in exhibition catalogues, for example Köhne and Ewigleben (2000). Interpretive studies include the articles in Bergmann and Kondoleon (1999), Bergmann (2008), and Tuck (2014). A book-length study is currently in preparation by Katherine Dunbabin.

Most discussions of the theater in art focus on Greece, but the following include sections on the Roman period: Bieber (1961), Green (1994), Green and Handley (1995). Webster (1967, 1978, and 1995) provide catalogues. For discussion of the extent to which traditional plays were still performed, see Fantham (1984), Jones (1993), and Dunbabin (2006). On pantomime in art see Jory (1996) and Dunbabin (2010). On performances in private houses, see Jones (1991), Dunbabin (1996), and Csapo (2010, 168–204).

For regional studies showing the popularity of gladiators and other performers across the Empire, see Jacobelli (2003) on Pompeii, Wilmott (2008) on Britain, and Roueché (1993) on Aphrodisias in Caria. On gladiators in the east, the key account remains Robert (1940). For discussion of named contestants and animals on mosaics in Britain and North Africa, see Leader-Newby (2007). For another view on gladiatorial scenes in houses, see Brown (1992). On religious festivals and civic identity in the eastern provinces, see Robert (1984), Mitchell (1990), van Nijf (1999), and Newby (2003 and 2005, 141–271).

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CHAPTER 28

Roman Art and Myth

Francesco de Angelis

Images of myth pervaded the Roman world. The ancients would bear mythological scenes on their seal-rings, touch them on coins, see them on lamps, be surrounded by them on the walls or on the floors of their houses, and admire them in sanctuaries; they would drink from cups decorated with mythological tales, be amazed at the huge sculptural groups of heroes and heroines displayed in imperial baths, pass by Greek paintings hanging on the walls of public porches, and be reminded of the basic values of life and death by the mythological episodes displayed on funerary monuments. No artifact, no spatial context, no realm of life was in principle untouched by myth. Of course, this ahistorical conflation of examples risks conveying a distorted image of the role of myth in Roman art. At no given time and in no given place was the range of possibilities contemporarily available in its totality, nor was the density of mythological imagery the same in each context or throughout time. Nevertheless, we should not underestimate the potential of myth for occupying a vast variety of positions in the visual landscape of the Romans, and fulfilling a corresponding variety of roles.

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the pervasiveness of mythological imagery in Roman art by emphasizing its very status as imagery, as well as its physicality and its relation to context. In so doing, it departs from more traditional approaches that subordinate the visual dimension to the verbal-narrative one (notwithstanding the undeniable fact that a narrative aspect of some kind is inherent by definition within scenes representing myths, or alluding to them). More generally, it differs from approaches that do not sufficiently take into account the specificity of the media that functioned as carriers of the myths—an issue that has increasingly occupied the focus of scholarly attention in recent years. The most important aspect in this context is undoubtedly that of *presence*. Art did not simply visualize myths; it provided them with durability and permanence. Other than in the case of the verbal versions of myth (be they texts meant to be read or theatrical performances), the existence of mythological images was not dependent—or was in any case less dependent—on outright reenactment: images of myth were continually there, provided with a physicality of their own. This circumstance not only made them more autonomous, but also implied a different kind of interaction between them and the historical agents. It was an interaction that involved the body—bodily awareness, bodily perception—in a very concrete way and was not necessarily mediated by cognitive filters, although it by no means excluded the cognitive dimension. Through its presence myth addressed visitors of places, beholders of images, and handlers of objects with a remarkable degree of immediacy and invited them not simply to recall the underlying tales but also, and even primarily, to react to the physicality of what they encountered, saw, and touched.

Mythological Images, Attention, and Social Practices

With presence being a constant feature, the effect of a mythological image varied depending on other factors, such as the degree (and kind) of attention devoted to it. Scenes from myth could be the focus of close inspection and the object of detailed description; they could resonate with the practices taking place in their same spaces; but they could just as well—and certainly more often—live a background existence as a sort of backdrop for activities only loosely or not at all related to them. Not even in this latter case, however, would they cease to operate, if only in unforeseen and unpredictable ways, affecting the persons that moved and acted in their presence. The attitude of the beholder and the context-determined social conventions and practices that governed it were crucial in this respect. An example of two almost opposite possibilities is provided by Petronius' caricatural account of a Roman dinner. Trimalchio spends some time talking about the mythological scenes decorating his vessels:

I own about a hundred four-gallon cups engraved with Cassandra killing her sons, and the boys are lying there dead so artfully executed that you would think they were alive. I have a thousand jugs which a patron bequeathed, where you see Daedalus shutting Niobe into the Trojan horse.

(Petronius, *Satyricon* 52)

The fact that the rich freedman is not able to identify the represented myths correctly and distorts even the most trite formulae for talking about such scenes makes the conventional character of his interest all the more evident. In other words, attentively looking at the mythological decoration of drinking vessels and using it as an impulse for table conversation must have been a socially expected, almost ritualized practice in the convivial context. No less interesting, on the other hand, is the absence of any reference to mythological wall paintings during the *cena*; without attributing excessive weight to Petronius' (and Trimalchio's) silence, which may have several different explanations, it reminds us that once the participants of a *convivium* had lain down on their dining couches, the painted myths embellishing the reception rooms as we know them from the Vesuvian cities could no longer be the object of close contemplation, both because of their position above the sight line of the reclining attendants and because the ones closest to their potential viewers were those placed at their backs (comparable conditions apply to several floor mosaics in late antique houses: see Muth 1998). The reduced degree of attention reserved for mythological paintings during the banquet, however, does not imply that they were irrelevant; on the contrary, they contributed to setting the tone for the event that took place in that space, conjuring up a distinctive atmosphere through their visual qualities and their associations (Lorenz 2008; see also Haug 2014). Dining in the presence of romantic couples of hovering lovers—Perseus and Andromeda ([Figures 13.3–13.4](#)), Poseidon and Amynone—such as in the great *oecus* of the House of the Vettii, was not the same experience as dining in front of the dramatic scene of Neoptolemus' murder by Orestes at the altar of Delphi, such as in the House of Lucretius Fronto ([Figure 19.6](#)), even if none of those images was looked at closely, let alone talked about. In other words, mythological images had the power of qualifying the perception and the experience of a given environment regardless of the attention devoted to them.

This characteristic also holds true of public contexts. Here, too, mythological images would

have been perceived differently depending on the more or less ritualized practices taking place in front of them; and here, too, they would have shaped in return the perception of the monuments on which they were placed. Thus, on the Ara Pacis, the figure of Aeneas solemnly offering a sacrifice to the Lares resonated not only with the similar one of Augustus in the procession frieze on the same monument, but also with those of the priests during the religious ceremonies that were staged there ([Figures 2.4, 10.4–10.5](#); Simon 1968; Rossini 2007); it thereby intensified the perception of the actual rituals, set the tone for them, and sustained the memory of their atmosphere during the intervals between festivities. In the Forum of Augustus, instead, the sculptural group of Aeneas rescuing his father and son in his dramatic flight from Troy was less immediately linked to the main activities that took place there: it introduced a note of heroic dynamism in the hemicycle where the urban praetor used to hear his cases, and placed judicial life under the aegis of the values of *pietas* without making any direct reference to law (Spannagel 1999). It can be easily surmised that the gazes of the beholders would have been more attentive in the first instance than in the second; even so, the visible presence of myth would not have left the everyday routine of Roman justice unaffected.

Bodies and Emotions

Besides the practices carried out in front of mythological images, another basic factor conditioning the recipients' attitudes would have been scale. In the Farnese Bull group, the colossal figures of Amphion and Zethus tying a desperate Dirce to the raging bull would have towered over the attendees of the great hall of the Caracalla Baths. Together with other similarly over-lifesize sculptures, they would have offered a commanding spectacle underscoring the magnificence of thermal architecture and at the same time reminding of the fiercely overwhelming character of the emperor's power (Hoff 2004). At the other extreme, the miniaturistic dimensions of the Tabulae Iliacae did not simply provide an ingenious presentation of the complex development of the epic cycle: they endowed their viewers with a sense of being able to easily—and literally—grasp the mythological narrative in its entirety, thereby reinforcing the mnemotechnical role of the careful articulation of the Homeric episodes in friezes and registers ([Figure 9.7](#): Squire 2011 and [Chapter 9](#), this volume).

The imagery of the Tabulae Iliacae is reduced to its basic iconographic features and thereby functions mainly as mythological identifier—as, for example, in the case of the representation of Aeneas with Anchises and Ascanius, which follows the aforementioned well-known group in the Forum of Augustus. Iconographic schemes play a fundamental role in allowing identification even if we get out of the Lilliputian world of the Tabulae. Usually, however, the tasks of postures, attitudes, and attributes of gods and heroes are much more complex: they suggest connotations, establish visual links with other myths and images, visualize relationships and interactions between characters, propose body ideals and types, define gender roles, and express emotional states. A scene such as that of Thetis contemplating Achilles' newly forged shield in Hephaestus' workshop ([Figure 28.1](#)), which occurs several times in Pompeian houses, is much more than simply an illustration of *Iliad* XVIII, or even than a retelling of that episode. The difference between Thetis' delicate dress and Hephaestus'

ragged one concurs with the contrast between the light complexion of the former and the tanned skin of the latter, not only to visualize the distinction between male and female, but also to draw the viewers' attention toward the respective social status of the two characters. The mythological episode thus becomes an occasion to thematize the relationship between a noble matron and an artisan. This motif was quite popular in Pompeii, as shown, for example, by the occurrences of another scene, Daedalus presenting to Pasiphae the wooden cow that he fabricated at her request—an image that has no mythological links with the one of Thetis and Hephaestus, yet shows a very similar situation. Moreover, Thetis' melancholic or astonished posture visualizes her feelings about her son's impending fate (Gury 1986). The exploration of mental states, expression of emotions, and display of different conditions of consciousness were traditionally a prime function of myth, one that was particularly well served by imagery. It is not by chance that so many of the mythological images in Roman art are centered precisely on the sphere of emotions. Countless examples exist: the reclined head of lovesick Phaedra at Hippolytus' rejection of her advances; Helen's seeming hesitation when about to make the fatal step and ascend Paris' ship; the aggressive posture of angry Achilles against Agamemnon, which is restrained only with difficulty by Athena; the tormented hand-wrenching of jealous Medea on her decision to kill her sons ([Figure 4.6](#)); Ariadne desperately bringing a hand to her face when realizing that Theseus has abandoned her; Amphitryon looking with a gesture of perplexity and surprise at baby Heracles killing the snakes; Penelope skeptically scrutinizing Odysseus, who still looks like a beggar. In all of these cases, the emphasis of the scene lies on the mental state of the represented character, and this condition is mainly conveyed through physical attitudes as well as facial expressions. The bodies of the heroes and heroines are thus the real protagonists of the images (for some of the examples mentioned here, see Settis 1975; Zanker 1999a; Trimble 2002; Elsner 2007).





Figure 28.1 Thetis in the forge of Hephaestus, wall painting from Pompeii, House of Paccius Alexander (IX.1.7). Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. 9529.

Photo: Marie-Lan Nguyen/Wikimedia Commons.

The postures and movements used to render the feelings of the mythological characters were conventional ones. Conventionality, however, did not diminish the impact of these bodies—in fact, they were effective precisely because of this quality. Not only did the quasi-topical nature of iconographic schemes (on which, see Catoni 2005) make them easily recognizable, but their frequent iteration in the visual landscape made it all the more likely that one would come across them from very early on in one's life. The bodily self-perception of the ancients would have been developed and refined by the encounter with such images—in a sense, they were tools of the education of one's own body.

Of course, these characteristics do not apply exclusively to mythological images, and even less so to Roman ones. A distinctively Roman feature in the use of mythological bodies, however, is represented by the identification of real persons with gods and heroes through portrait heads. The custom of combining the face of a contemporary Roman with an idealized Greek body is already attested in the late second century BCE, and presupposes the Roman opposition between the head as the seat of individuality and the rest of the body as an indicator of social status and general qualities. The roots of this trend can be found in the portraiture of the Hellenistic rulers: the representation of a semi-nude Augustus sitting as Jupiter on the throne

flanked by an eagle on the Gemma Augustea ([Figure 10.8](#); Zwierlein-Diehl 2008), or the portrait bust of Commodus presenting himself with Hercules' lion skin and club (Hoff 2005), have their precursors in works like the Pergamene group of Prometheus rescued by Heracles bearing the facial traits of a Greek king (Smith 1988). However, it is only once the body prototypes are “frozen” by classicizing tendencies and juxtaposed to stylistically divergent portrait heads that the phenomenon acquires its peculiarly Roman features. Mythological identification in Rome is not restricted to the rulers and the members of the highest elite, but finds widespread acceptance also among commoners, who take advantage of it in order to ascribe particular qualities to the ones thus portrayed. For example, a famous statue of the Severan period representing a woman as Omphale is probably to be read as an homage by the loving husband to his wife's overwhelming influence at the same time as a celebration of her modesty, as expressed in the *pudicitia* gesture (Zanker 1999b; for a different reading, see Kampen 1996).

The phenomenon is particularly noticeable on sarcophagi, where the portrayed persons are embedded within the mythological narrative itself, and are thus associated in an even stronger way with the actions and feelings of the characters (Zanker and Ewald 2004/2012; Newby 2011a). This is the case of a matron expressing her grief at the loss of the daughter through her portrait identification with Demeter desperately looking for the abducted Persephone, or of a marital couple visualizing their relationship by providing Admetus and Alcestis with their own facial features. The centrality of the visual dimension allows for a high degree of semantic flexibility, especially as regards the abstraction from the narrative context. An extreme case is that of the sarcophagi featuring Achilles, who supports dying Penthesileia amid a series of Amazon duels; the group stands for the power of love despite the separation induced by death, regardless of the fact that according to the myth it was Achilles himself who had inflicted the Amazon queen with the mortal wound: only one particular aspect of the tale is highlighted, and the ones that potentially conflict with it are downplayed. Similarly, a sarcophagus now in Cliveden that provides both Ariadne and Theseus with portraits was commissioned by a mother for her pre-deceased son, as we know from its inscription; in this case, the myth of the abandoned lover is used as a very generic term of comparison for the feelings of a bereaved mother. Clearly, what makes the myth relevant to Roman users is not the precise typology of affection involved, but rather its *intensity*. It is on this basis that the real world becomes directly involved with the mythological one.

Of course, there also are limits to the degree of immediate identification through portraits. This is best shown by the contrast between two sarcophagi from a tomb near Bordeaux that feature two romantic encounters: one of Selene with Endymion, and the other of Bacchus with Ariadne. Interestingly, whereas in the first case the heads of both protagonists were meant to bear portrait features, in the second one Bacchus is represented with the usual idealized face (the male portrait was reserved for a togate figure on the lid) and only Ariadne's face has been left uncarved for this purpose. Evidently, the soft and effeminate body of the god of wine was deemed inappropriate for identification by a man. This example provides good testimony that these combinations, as playful and light-hearted as they may appear, were taken quite seriously. Nor is it coincidental that we find them mainly in funerary contexts. In the realm of domestic

wall painting, for example, the occasional occurrence of a goddess carrying a contemporary hairstyle may allude to identification with a real woman, but the phenomenon is never as conspicuous as in funerary art (one notable exception are two portrait tondi in the house of Lucretius Fronto in Pompeii, where a boy and a girl are represented with the attributes of Diana and Mercury: Clarke 1991, 159, figs. 81–82). It is not necessary to postulate the existence of specific beliefs in immortality through heroization to account for the concentration of portrait identifications in the funerary sphere. Nonetheless, this specialization shows that the appropriation of the bodies of mythological characters carried particularly elevating connotations that were not deemed appropriate for every context. The relationship between the Romans and the mythological images that surrounded them was indeed a complex one.

Fantasy and Reality

An important role in this relationship was played by the ontological status of mythological images *as images*, and in particular as representations referencing something (or someone) absent: they were not just part of reality, they expanded and intensified it. Even more crucially, they did not effect this expansion and intensification through simple mirroring of reality, but through fantasy, thanks to their mythological quality (Zanker 1999c; Muth 2000). This was evident on several different levels: on the narrative one, whereby the represented scenes were linked to stories set in a distant past and characterized by fabulous or exotic elements; on the iconographic level, which represented beings, like the Satyrs or the Centaurs, as well as behaviors and costumes, such as nudity (on which see Bonfante 1989; Hallett 2005), that one would not come across in normal life; on the stylistic level, which employed an overall register of idealization in order to mark the distance between the divine-heroic world and the real one. Thus, while not devoid of connections to the world of the beholders, mythological images were no mere reduplications of the real, but rather something different, something more.

Myth always came with a “plus” with respect to reality, and this element constituted its peculiar strength. This holds true even in the most seemingly trivial of cases. The image of Marsyas about to be flayed at the command of Apollo that decorates a Roman knife handle (Zanker 2010, 43, fig. 25) quite obviously alludes to the functions to which the knife was put—rather ordinary functions, one would imagine. We can understand this relationship as a banalization of the myth, and we would not be wrong. This would be a one-sided reading, however. Just as important, a mythological knife like the one mentioned raises the activities for which it is used above the level of the everyday; it creates a force field, as it were, that adds a layer—the layer of imagination—to the perception of reality. Thanks to the “plus” element, myths often functioned as amplifiers of reality—especially of emotions or of emotional responses. This is particularly evident in the images with violent deaths on sarcophagi. The Medea sarcophagi, for example, juxtapose scenes of unaware happiness and tragic fate, not just once but twice ([Figure 28.2](#)): first, with the image of Glauce during her wedding followed by her horrible death while her father desperately and helplessly watches her burning away in flames; then, with the two sons of Medea playing under the gaze of their mother and

subsequently carried away by her as corpses. Similarly, the sarcophagi with the Niobids display a whole array of untimely deaths, and those with the return of Meleager's corpse show the reactions of the whole family to the hero's death, intensifying in several degrees up to Althaea's suicide (Fittschen 1992; Lorenz 2011). These images reminded viewers not only that even mythological heroes had to suffer, but that their destinies were often much worse and more painful than the viewers' own ones, thereby functioning as consolatory motives (Zanker and Ewald 2004/2012, 76–90). Of course, the amplifying function worked in a positive sense as well. The scenes with loving couples in domestic wall paintings—Dionysus and Ariadne, Mars and Venus, Meleager and Atalanta, Perseus and Andromeda ([Figure 13.5](#)), and so on—were meant to resonate with the situation of the viewers, or, more precisely, to focus the viewers' awareness on this particular aspect of their own situation, thereby increasing its relevance in their perception.



[Figure 28.2](#) Sarcophagus with Glaucus and Medea. Rome, Museo Museo Nazionale Romano.

Photo: DAI Rom 63.545.

Function, Context, and *Decorum*

As the preceding paragraphs may have already suggested, the decision of what myth to represent was strongly dependent on the display context; that is, on the function(s) of a given space—or of a given artifact, for that matter—and on the social practices connected to it. Monumental and artistic genre, insofar as it is related to function and is determined by it, plays a paramount role in this respect. It fosters the creation of distinct repertoires of mythological images, each of which is specifically tied to a class of objects. The key principle here is *decorum*; that is, the appropriateness of an image to its setting (Hölscher 2004; Bravi 2012). Just as Cicero deemed certain images (e.g., a combined representation of Hermes and Athena: *Letters to Atticus* 1.4.3) to be particularly apposite for the gymnasium of his villa in Tusculum, and other ones (such as the Maenads purchased for him by Fadius Gallus, *Letters to his Friends* 7.23.1–3) utterly inappropriate not only for a particular space, but for the villa—and his own personality—at large, so narrative scenes of myth were selected and employed

according to their perceived relationship to the character of a certain environment or the typology of a certain artifact (Neudecker 1988 and [Chapter 20](#), this volume). The relationship of myth to context need not have been established on just one level, but could have been manifold.

An apt example is that of the mythological statues from the villa at Sperlonga ([Figure 20.4](#)), particularly the two large groups featuring the blinding of Polyphemus ([Figure 28.3](#)) and the capture of Ulysses' companions by Scylla (most recently, Kunze 2010). Both groups are connected to their physical environment in a very basic way. The setting in a cave—and in its uttermost recess, at that—for the episode with Polyphemus does not require any particular justification, nor does the choice to decorate the center of the large water basin with one of the most famous marine adventures of Ulysses. In both cases, the flooded grotto provides a convenient “realistic” environment based on the indications of the tale itself. The relationship of the mythological figures to the context is not limited to this aspect, however. On the one hand, the ancient association of caves and underground recesses with uncanniness (Lavagne 1988) is consonant with the inherently frightening dimension of the represented episodes, the emotional potential of which is effectively exploited by the highly pathetic style of the statues. On the other hand, the role of the whole ensemble as a spectacle for the diners reclining on an artificial triclinium-island situated at the mouth of the grotto recalls the link to the practices that took place there. Indeed, both Scylla and Polyphemus thematize the issue of eating (and drinking), albeit presenting it in a distorted way: Scylla is feeding her canine protomes with the heroes she pulls from Ulysses' ship; Polyphemus is not only a man-eater himself, he is also incapable of drinking wine in a proper fashion, and is therefore about to succumb to Ulysses' cunning (Schmid 2003). The chosen myths thus relate directly to the situation of the viewers, mirroring it through its inversion: by violating the normal dining code, the two monsters draw the diners' attention to the code itself and to the dangers entailed by its transgression. Thus, not only is the representation of these myths particularly appropriate to the banquet setting and closely connected to the actual practices occurring in this context, but it is precisely thanks to this connection that it is able to enrich and transform the experience of the banquet itself.



Figure 28.3 Blinding of Polyphemus, from the Villa of Sperlonga. Sperlonga, Museo Archeologico.

Photo: F. de Angelis.

The principle of *decorum*, however, should be understood as a general regulative criterion, not as a binding rule that generates strict categories of inclusion and exclusion. In fact, one of the most striking features of the diffusion of myths in Roman art is that in principle no myth appears to be reserved to one single artistic medium or particular context. Even in the case of scenes such as the rape of Persephone by Hades, which is not by chance found overwhelmingly in funerary settings, it is possible to mention occurrences elsewhere, for example on coins struck by several cities, from Enna in Sicily to Nysa in Asia Minor, which claimed to be the location of that event and evidently used the myth in order to bolster local pride and identity (LIMC 8.1, 970 s.v. *Persephone* nos. 241–245; cf. Price 2005). The absence of a priori exclusion rules, of course, does not imply that the choice of myths was arbitrary, but rather that *decorum* could be understood in different, even diverging, ways by different people or in different time periods. Moreover, not everything appropriate was necessarily regarded as being also desirable. It does not come as a surprise, for example, that the myth of Protesilaus and Laodamia is represented in the sepulchral context: the story of the husband who after his death in battle was allowed temporarily to rise from the underworld to visit his unconsolable wife (who then committed suicide on being left behind by the phantom) appears to be ideally suited for a funerary monument. Yet, only two sarcophagi were decorated with this myth, as compared to the circa 110 occurrences on the same monuments of Selene and Endymion

([Figure 15.4](#); cf. Koortbojian, [Chapter 15](#), this volume), whose love story is less directly related to death; or the more than 400 representations of Dionysos and his thiasus, where the reference to the funerary sphere is even less emphasized (Zanker 2005). Clearly, the desire to celebrate the intensity of love by focusing on its romantic dimension outside of the institutional frame of marriage and with an emphasis on melancholy rather than on tragedy (Endymion), or the possibility of replacing the idea of death altogether with images of joy and pleasure (Dionysiac thiasus), must have been more appealing than an outright—and otherwise perfectly appropriate—reference to loss and mourning.

As this example alone demonstrates, in order properly to appreciate the relevance and meaning of a myth in a given context, its frequency (as well as its chronology) within the repertoire is no less relevant than its outright presence or absence from it. In the case of myths that occur a limited number of times, however, it can be especially difficult—and to some extent it may even be pointless—to come up with a univocal assessment; the boundaries between purposeful intention, whimsical eccentricity, and violation of *decorum* are not easy to establish. So, for example, the representation of the punishment of Ixion in the presence of Hera (whom he had tried to rape) in one of the *triclinia* of the House of the Vettii ([Figure 28.4](#); *PPM* 5, 468–572) is not to be found elsewhere in Pompeian houses; but it would be a mistake to see it as an infringement of conventions, or simply to attribute its choice to the stereotypical desire of the freedman owner of the house to show off mythological learning (although the display of culture was certainly part of the rules of the game here). On the contrary, even in its uniqueness it beautifully resonates with the emphasis that the other paintings in the same room—Daedalus presenting the wooden cow to Pasiphae; Dionysus finding Ariadne asleep on the seashore—place on the variety of forms that love can acquire. At the same time, it references other themes such as retribution and vengeance (death of Pentheus; Dirce and the bull) that occur elsewhere in the same house and are popular in Pompeii in the same period.



Figure 28.4 Punishment of Ixion, wall painting. Pompeii, House of the Vettii (VI.15.1).

Photo: Columbia University.

The Plasticity of Myth

The scene with Ixion is a good illustration of a further important aspect of myth in relation to

decorum; namely, its plasticity—not only on the narrative level, but also as regards the visual dimension. It is this plasticity that allows myth to highlight those features that are particularly relevant in a given context and thereby adapt to different settings. Indeed, the Ixion painting is conspicuous not only because of its unusual subject, but also because it relegates the mythological protagonist of the story to the borders of the image (only half of Ixion's body is visible), whereas the actual visual focus of the image is Hermes, who in the narrative played a subordinate role as the carrier of Zeus' orders. Here, instead, his tanned and athletic body is placed in the foreground at the very center of the scene, and the gazes and gestures of the female characters (including Hera's) are directed toward him. This concentration on Hermes, which makes the whole painting look like a frame for his figure, is best explained by the crucial role that the god—or rather his Roman counterpart Mercury—played as the protector of commerce and bestower of wealth (the visual references to economic affluence in the House of the Vettii are numerous, starting with the image of Priapus weighing his phallus against a purse of money right at the entrance).

Such emphasis acquires a more specific tone if we think of the paucity of explicit references to the sphere of *negotium* in domestic wall painting during the early imperial period: realistic images depicting labor or alluding to the running of business can often be found on house façades (Fröhlich 1991), but are by and large absent from domestic interiors in Pompeii (the most notable exceptions occurring when the interior spaces themselves are used as workshops). Thanks to its transposition onto a different level of reality, myth is effectively able to mediate between the interests of the commissioner and the conventions dictated by genre and context. The painter very likely altered, and almost twisted, the myth in order to satisfy the patron's wishes. Again, it is tempting to read such an extreme example of adaptation as an expression of idiosyncratic fancy or of a *nouveau riche*'s obsession with wealth (on the issue, see Mayer 2012). This may or may not be the case. What is really relevant is that even this image did not violate the rules of *decorum*. Indeed, the alteration of the myth of Ixion is by no means isolated in Roman art: suffice it to mention the way in which Phaedra is sometimes portrayed on sarcophagi not as the tormented and passion-prone stepmother of Hippolytus, but as his quasi-maternal admirer, and how Hippolytus himself can be presented as the paradigm of the learned and well-educated youth, rather than a love-despising hunter (Zanker 1999a); or how Hylas on floor mosaics turns from the passive object of the Nymphs' lust to an active and virile hero (Muth 1999). Context and genre are of course paramount in order to understand the reason for these alterations. The image of Medea looking at her own children holding a sword in her hand occurs both in domestic wall painting ([Figure 4.6](#)) and on sarcophagi ([Figure 28.2](#)). However, whereas in the house the main focus of the scene is on the heroine with her torment (Bergmann 1996), in the tomb the same figure is embedded within a much more extended representation; in fact, the real protagonist of the so-called Medea sarcophagi is her unhappy rival Glauce, whose pitiful and untimely destiny occupies two-thirds of the available space and was evidently much more relevant in a funerary context (Fittschen 1992).

Context-driven and function-driven changes can be even more extreme, involving the (visual) invention of completely new episodes, or the subversion of the narrative sequence in multiscenic representations—both features that occur, for example, on the Orestes sarcophagi

(Bielfeldt 2005). On the other hand, context can affect the meaning and connotations of myth with only minimal adjustments. A case in point is the aforementioned group with Aeneas fleeing from Troy, which occurs relatively often in antiquity. In the Forum of Augustus, its spatial combination with the gallery of members of the Julian family stressed his role as originator of the *gens* and consequently as ancestor of Augustus. The importance of the genealogical principle was, moreover, inscribed in the visual appearance of the group itself: by displaying his care for the old father and the young son in a dramatic situation, Aeneas did not simply advertise *pietas*, but explicitly thematized the continuity and succession of generations (Spannagel 1999). The genealogical aspect will have likely played a role also in the case of the rather faithful replica of the same group in the Claudian forum of Mérida (Colonia Iulia Augusta Emerita), the provincial capital of Lusitania (Barrera and Trillmich 1996). Although there is no positive evidence of a connection with statues of the Julians there, by referencing the ruling house this copy intended to stress the links of the city to Rome (as did several other elements of Mérida's forum, which were inspired by the Forum of Augustus). In addition to that, however, the group in Mérida might have acquired special connotations precisely because of its provincial context: similar to the forefathers of the colony's citizens, Aeneas had left his hometown to found a new city, and was therefore likely to be perceived as a powerful paradigm for the inhabitants of Mérida themselves.

A second example of the shift in the associations determined by the context is provided by the inclusion of the same constellation of figures among the 180 figural relief panels of the Sebasteion of Aphrodisias, in Asia Minor ([Figures 28.5](#), 24.2; Smith 2013 and [Chapter 24](#), this volume). The reference to the ruling house was unmistakable given the placement of the image in a building for the imperial cult. Yet the scene was not only an expression of loyalty to the center of power, it was also a manifestation of local pride: not by chance did the sculptor add the figure of Aphrodite, the city's patron goddess and Aeneas' mother, tenderly touching Ascanius' shoulder with her hand. Even more interestingly, this relief was part of the series of mythological scenes that decorated the second story of the building, and was therefore not grouped with the scenes of properly imperial content (portraits of the emperors, allegories of power and victory, and so on) on the third register. In other words, the context stressed the appropriation of Aeneas by the Aphrodisians and presented him not so much as a protagonist of Roman legendary history, but rather as a hero of *Greek* mythology and of *Greek* cultural memory. Despite the iconographic similarities, then, in each of these three cases the flight of Aeneas conveyed a different, context-bound message, whereby "context" evidently references both the immediate physical setting and the wider geographical and cultural locus of these images within the Empire.



Figure 28.5 Relief with Aeneas fleeing from Troy, from the Sebasteion of Aphrodisias. Aphrodisias, Museum.

Photo: F. de Angelis.

Greek Myths and Roman Myths

The just-mentioned issue of the Greek versus Roman character of the represented myths has a relevance that goes beyond the issue of context, however, so that it is appropriate to conclude the chapter with a brief discussion of it. The paucity of representations of Roman myths and legends vis-à-vis Greek ones in Roman art is a highly remarkable phenomenon, which can only partially be explained by the alleged *Mythenlosigkeit* (“lack of myths”) of Roman culture (Graf 1993). A more likely explanation is that the primary function of “Roman myths” is typically a very specific one; namely, an aetiological one: it aims to disclose the origins and the causes of the current state of things, particularly as regards Rome and its institutions (How was the city founded? Why is a sacrifice performed in a certain way?). Virgil’s *Aeneid* and Ovid’s *Fasti* exemplify very well the range of possibilities. It is because of this foundational value that representations of Roman myths tend to be found on official monuments in the public sphere from very early on. Even excluding the extant bronze statue of the Capitoline she-wolf (on which, see Bartoloni 2010), the addition of the twins to a pre-existing statue of the animal by the Ogulnii brothers in 296 BCE (Livy 10.23.12) and the concomitant numismatic emission featuring the same characters (Parisi Presicce 2000, 45–47) show that by the mid-Republican period at the latest, this quintessentially Roman myth was deemed worthy or in need of public figural representation. Similarly, sequences of episodes from Rome’s legendary past decorated civic buildings such as the Basilica Aemilia in the Forum Romanum (Kränzle 1994) and the basilica of Ostia (Becatti 1943–1945). In these and many other similar cases, the myths had a charter role, illustrating the origins of the city and celebrating some of its basic values. Aetiology and genealogy mainly worked to reinforce the role of the tales as paradigmatic *exempla* that instructed Romans about shared ideals and kinds of behavior, as well as about what to avoid (e.g., Kampen 1991).

Generally, however, myths in Rome tend to be devoid of strong binding connotations. In most cases, the myths and their related images rather function as prestigious terms of comparison. They provide a frame of reference against which one measures one’s own condition and behavior. Lacking a prescriptive or normative function in the strict sense, myths instead invite reflection about reality. Their relationship with the real world and its values can thus be an ambivalent one; their ultimate interpretation is open (although by no means arbitrary). It is within this frame that the Greekness of myths comes to play a crucial role: on the one hand, it lends them enough prestige that they are taken seriously; on the other hand, it creates a sense of distance and otherness that does not require the viewer to establish explicit connections (other than in the case of Roman charter myths). In other words, Greek myths provide a free space for thinking, and can be conceived as flexible aids for interpreting reality. This makes them particularly apt for the private realm, where the represented episodes are not necessarily congruent with the official system of Roman values. To give just one example, Helen falling in love with Paris while looking at him can be understood both in a positive sense (as a celebration of the power of love) and in a negative one (as a representation of an adulteress), but the images do not provide clear clues as to what aspect is prevailing (Bergmann 1996). The very popularity of love-related myths in domestic imagery—not to speak of ambiguously gendered characters such as Hermaphroditus—shows that the issue of moral judgment is beside the point here. The point is not that myths are immoral, but that they are not moralizing either. Greek mythological images allow a safe exploration of possibilities that diverge from

the existing order without pre-empting decisions about the endorsement or the subversion of this order; and ultimately, it is this quality that explains the popularity and pervasiveness of myth in Roman art—as well as in Roman culture at large.

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

The volumes of the *LIMC* (1981–2009) provide the most complete repertoire of mythological images of the Roman world, but there is no critical study that analyzes this imagery in a synthetic perspective (see, however, Newby 2011b). Scholarship has instead tended to focus on individual categories of monuments and artifacts. Some case studies that are representative of recent approaches and stress the visual dimension of mythological images are collected in de Angelis and Muth (1999; see especially Ewald 1999, Muth 1999, Zanker 1999a).

Domestic wall paintings and sarcophagi are the two most important and most intensively studied groups of mythological image-bearing artifacts (for a joint treatment see, most recently, Mayer 2012, whose conclusions require further discussion).

As for wall paintings, the main repertoire (*PPM* 1990–2003) unfortunately lacks thematic indexes, so that consultation of Schefold (1957) is still necessary. Methodologically innovative studies are B. Bergmann (1994, 1996, and 1999), Zanker (1999c), Leach (2002), Lorenz (2008); for further approaches, see also Romizzi (2006) and Hodske (2007).

Mythological sarcophagi are collected in volumes 2–3.3 and 12.1–12.6 of the series *Die antiken Sarkophagreliefs* (*ASR*; for a more concise overview, see Sichtermann and Koch 1975). A groundbreaking and comprehensive interpretation of this class of monuments is provided by Zanker and Ewald (2004/2012). Furthermore, relevant from a methodological point of view are Fittschen (1992), Müller (1994), Koortbojian (1995), and Bielfedt (2005; see also Elsner and Huskinson 2011).

Other categories of artifacts with myths comprise decorative reliefs (Lehmann 1996) and sculptural groups, in particular those featuring Homeric themes (Andreae and Parisi Presicce 1996; Carey 2002; Squire 2009, 202–238; Kunze 2010). Several recent studies focus on the relationship between mythological images and literary texts: for example, Biering (1995), Elsner (2000 and 2007), Amedick (2002), and Squire (2009 and 2011). No less important are works that examine mythological images in the provinces and in late antiquity: for instance, M. Bergmann (1999), Muth (1998—an approach with much broader methodological relevance—and 2001), Ewald (2004 and 2011), Leader-Newby (2004), and Stirling (2005).

A discussion of attention with further bibliography on the topic can be found in Assmann and Assmann (2001) and Schroer (2014). On presence, see Belting (2001/2011) and Gumbrecht (2004).

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PART VII

Reception of Roman Art in the Modern World

CHAPTER 29

The Myth of Pompeii

Fragments, Frescos, and the Visual Imagination

Rosemary J. Barrow

From Angelica Kauffmann's 1785 painting of *Pliny and his Mother at Misenum* to the Coney Island pyrodramas in 1890s New York; from the 1971 British film comedy *Up Pompeii* to Robert Harris's 2003 novel *Pompeii*, the South Italian town buried by the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE has occupied an important role in the modern imagination. The focus of this chapter is the reception of Pompeian wall painting, which itself offers a distinctive example of the way in which antiquity is reimagined by successive generations. Socio-historical scholarship may see Pompeian interior decoration, in its own terms, as a manifestation of Roman consumerism, status, aspiration, and the transformation of urban space, but in the post-classical world, the fresco—decontextualized, fragmented, constructed—acquires a new autonomy, although one that still derives resonance from its original context. Wall painting functions as a symbol of Pompeian culture and (even) of the whole Roman past. The four visual examples chosen for discussion here—a decorated interior by eighteenth-century architect Robert Adam; a painting by Victorian artist Lawrence Alma-Tadema; a film by Italian art-cinema director Federico Fellini; and a series of works by abstract expressionist painter Mark Rothko—derive from different periods and genres and yet are united by the choice of the Pompeian fresco as central signifier of an inspirational Roman world.

The rediscovery of Herculaneum in 1738 and Pompeii in 1748 provided the modern world with a unique view of antiquity. Both sites yielded not only a plethora of art objects, but also a glimpse of Roman domestic life. The first excavations, sponsored by Charles III, king of the Two Sicilies, were designed to recover *objets d'art* for the royal collection (Cooley 2003; Harris 2007). Frescos were sought-after finds valued as masterpieces copied from Greek originals, and decorative schemes were repeatedly destroyed when prize paintings were cut out of walls. The dislocated frescos were framed, backed with slate, and glazed for display in the manner of the modern canvas (Moormann 1991; D'Alconzo 2007). Charles' collection, housed in the royal palace at Portici, was published in *Le antichità di Ercolano esposte* (1757–92), eight folio volumes—four of which were dedicated solely to wall paintings—each including lavishly engraved illustrations. The engravings themselves were meticulously reworked, so as to provide pristine versions of damaged originals. Indeed, the disparity between the originals and the engravings brought disappointment to travelers who saw the originals only after examining the *Antichità* versions. One such disenchanted visitor, a Mr Freeman, wrote to Lady Mary Capel as early as 1750:

The king is now employing a person to take drawings of all the statues, and the principal paintings, with an intent to publish them ... The statues cannot be made to appear more beautiful than they really are; but the writer imagines the world will be vastly deceived with regard to the paintings. For the man is a very nice drawer; and has also managed the colouring to advantage, so that he has made exceedingly pretty things, from originals, which are miserable daubings.

(quoted in Coltman 2006, 102)

From the first, then, with an emphasis placed on enhancement of the image, collectors and commentators strove to reconcile excavated Pompeii with contemporary notions of a classical ideal. Artists, likewise, when looking to frescos for inspiration and imitation, did so with the goal of improvement.

One *Antichità* engraving of a wall painting from the Villa Arianna at Stabiae formed the basis of a painting by the French artist Joseph-Marie Vien entitled *The Cupid Seller* (1763, Musée national du château, Fontainebleau). While the *Antichità* version is restored, Vien's picture reworks the initial fresco. He prettifies his scene substantially. For an old woman selling cupids in a cage, he substitutes a young girl with her cupids in a basket; a cupid sitting ambiguously between the legs of the buyer, he omits altogether; and while the theme of "love for sale" is still present, the erotic potential of the Roman original is noticeably absent. Unlike the Roman fresco or its engraving, Vien's background is self-consciously classicizing; funerary urn, pedestal, bronze brazier, lion-legged table, and chair all recall Pompeian prototypes, but evoke a neo-classical aesthetic as much as a Roman one.

Robert Adam

In eighteenth-century France, the Louis XVI style made way for more archaeologically based Empire designs, which soon spread across Europe. In Britain, Regency fashions included Hepplewhite and Sheraton furniture and Wedgwood porcelain, while Robert Adam incorporated Roman motifs into his interior designs. The Etruscan dressing room at Osterley Park House in Middlesex (1775–76, [Figure 29.1](#)) includes slender arabesques and stylized scrolling branches and candelabra, sphinxes and grotesques, all supporting painted medallions. A pale blue monochrome background, vegetal, architectural and figural detail, and floating compositions evoke Third-Style Roman wall decoration, richly represented in Herculaneum and Pompeii. Indeed, the ornamental style and playful perspective at Osterley even recall painted walls described, but condemned, by Vitruvius toward the end of the first century BCE:

But these paintings [figural scenes], which had taken their models from real things, now fall foul of depraved taste. For monsters are now painted in frescoes rather than reliable images of definite things. Reeds are set up in place of columns, as pediments, little scrolls, striped with curly leaves and volutes, candelabra hold up the figures of aediculae; and above the pediments of these, several tender shoots, sprouting in coils from roots, have little statues nestling in them for no reason, or shoots split in half, some hiding little statues with human heads, some with the heads of beasts.

(Vitruvius, *De Architectura* 7.5.3)



Figure 29.1 Robert Adam, The Etruscan Dressing Room, Osterley Park House, Middlesex.

Photo: © NTPL/Bill Batten.

While eighteenth-century excavators paid most attention to figurative scenes, the *Antichità* illustrations also included ornamental examples of the type of which Vitruvius so disapproved. In general, decorative schemes were obliterated when murals were cut out of walls, but in 1755 a complete fresco cycle was detached from the Praedia of Julia Felix for the first time, allowing Adam and others a visual sense of a wall's whole appearance.

Adam's sources are eclectic and range from antiquity to the Renaissance and beyond. Piranesi's illustrated publication, *Diverse maniere d'adornare i camini* (1769), is cited as a precedent for its advocacy of the use of antique urns for contemporary wall designs (Stillman 1967, 203). The room's name at Osterley, of course, indicates the relationship with Greek vases that is in any case evident in the terracotta and black wall medallions and specially designed furniture. Adam's access to vases came through illustrations of William Hamilton's collection, published in four volumes as *Collection of Etruscan, Greek and Roman Antiquities* (1766–76, cf. Coltman 2000). Like the *Antichità* illustrations, Hamilton's vases were restored for publication; and just as Charles' frescos were reproduced in porcelain through the Bourbon factory in Naples (Najberg 2007, 63–64), Hamilton's vases inspired Wedgwood's line of "Etruscan" ware. Indeed, Horace Walpole described a visit to the room in Osterley in 1778 as an experience akin to "going out of a palace into a potter's field" (Horace Walpole to Reverend William Mason, 16 July 1778, quoted in Harris 2001, 77). In the preface to *The Works in Architecture of Robert and James Adam* (1779), Adam himself declared that his decorative schemes were "imitated from the vases and urns of the Etruscans," but, as Vicky Coltman points out, they might be more accurately termed "invented fabrications" (Coltman 2006, 93). Adam's reception of Etruscan vases and Pompeian frescos is doubly distanced from antiquity, subject to the designer's own modifications and mediated through substantially retouched engravings.

Originally an Elizabethan mansion, Osterley Park House, under the ownership of Sir Francis Child and his heirs, was transformed into a Palladian villa. Adam was commissioned to undertake architectural alterations and interior refurbishment, so ensuring that the one complemented the other in immaculate neo-classical fashion. The Etruscan dressing room echoed a similar commission at Derby House in London's Grosvenor Square (1775), which featured the same type of ornamentation and black and terracotta coloring on a pale background. Both rooms were designed to function as a lady's boudoir and private sitting room. However, like the Roman domus itself, the aristocratic English house was intended to be a public as much as a private space, as is illustrated by Walpole's inspection (and subsequent criticism) of the room in which Mrs. Child (granddaughter-in-law of Francis Child) would undertake her toilette and receive intimate guests.

Adam visited Herculaneum but not Pompeii. While access to both sites was limited, initially more attention was given to Herculaneum. In 1767, William Hamilton wrote from Naples (where he was British envoy to the Bourbon Court) complaining about inefficient excavation technique and disappointing progress:

At Pompeii they employ 10 or 12 men only and those improperly, for instead of entering the principal gate of the Town which was discovered above 5 years ago they dip here and there in search of pieces of Antiquity and then fill up.

(letter to the Reverend Doctor William Robertson, quoted in Ramage 1992, 654)

Nevertheless, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, the uncovering of important locations, including the Temple of Isis and the Villa of Diomedes, together with the clearing of the amphitheater and the Forum under Napoleon's occupation of the kingdom of Naples, all led to

a new privileging of Pompeii. Visiting restrictions were lifted and Charles's Portici collection was transferred to Naples, where it was to become the National Archaeological Museum.

Major European publications such as François Mazois's *Les Ruines de Pompei* (1783–1826) and William Gell's *Pompeiana: The Topography, Edifices and Ornaments of Pompeii* (1817–19) presented new details of Pompeian excavations. In Britain, the increased public profile of the site helped to engender a successful literary recreation of the town's dramatic demise: Edward Bulwer-Lytton's historical novel *The Last Days of Pompeii*, published in 1834, became an immediate bestseller and remained in print throughout the century. An imaginative work validated by archaeological and scholarly detail, Lytton's novel depicts no fragments of antiquity, but, following eighteenth-century precedents, a reconstructed Roman world whose preface proclaims its author's desire "to people once more those deserted streets, to repair those graceful ruins, to reanimate the bones which were yet spared to his survey, to traverse the gulf of eighteen centuries, and to wake to a second existence—the City of the Dead!" (Lytton 1834, v).

In Lytton's novel, fictional names exist alongside characterizations of actual Pompeian householders—Julia Felix, Diomedes, Sallust, Pansa—whose names are familiar from archaeological records. His sources are the letters of Pliny, objects housed in the museum in Naples, and Gell's *Pompeiana*. For the home of his hero Glaucus, Lytton chooses the House of the Tragic Poet (VI.8.3–5), a medium-sized Pompeian house situated opposite the Forum baths and excavated in 1824 (Bergmann 1994). It is described by Gell as having "excited the most lively interest in the public mind ... on account of the paintings and mosaics with which it was decorated" (Gell 1832, 143). Both writers include rapturous descriptions of its frescos, with Gell suggesting that the scene of Achilles and Briseis "has been the means of awakening the attention of artists and of the public to the hitherto depreciated merit of the masters of antiquity" (Gell 1832, 155), and Lytton that its "*point of expression* would scarcely disgrace a Raphael" (Lytton 1834, 39). Here, then, Roman frescos could at last match their reputation as high-art imitations of lost Greek masterpieces. For Lytton, the quantity and quality of the mythological wall paintings in the House of the Tragic Poet (which remained unrivaled until the excavation of the House of the Vettii in the 1890s) served as an indicator of archaeological exactitude and a suitable index of the refined taste of the Greek-born Glaucus. The author's introduction to the house reminds the reader of the distance between past and present—"Alas! The colours are faded now, the walls stripped of their paintings! Its main beauty, its elaborate finish of grace and ornament, is gone" (Lytton 1834, 32)—but his own description of a house in immaculate condition illustrates how the Pompeian past is figured as a reality that art can revivify rather than simply chronicle.

In the same imaginative spirit, Victorian artists attempted to reassemble ancient Pompeii through the medium of historical genre paintings placed in archaeologically specific surroundings. From the mid to late 1860s, British artists began to produce genre scenes of Roman life at a time when new archaeological projects at Pompeii, under the directorship of Giuseppe Fiorelli, were beginning to unearth a wealth of information relating to the ordinary life of ancient Rome (Castiglione Morelli 1999). Fiorelli focused his attentions on preservation, instituted a new system of recording excavation, and carefully surveyed the site

before digging began. He published a map of excavations that divided the town into *regiones* and *insulae* (a system that was to form the basis for all future Pompeian topography) and also made archaeological discovery a model of accessibility through the publication of finds in *Descrizione di Pompei* (1875) and *Guida di Pompei* (1877) and the establishment of a new museum on site. In contrast to limited access under the Bourbons, Fiorelli attracted an increasing number of visitors, many of whom were foreign tourists. Now, for the first time, tourists, scholars, and artists alike were able to get a real sense of Roman social life within a historically accurate visual context.

Lawrence Alma-Tadema

The Dutch-born artist Lawrence Alma-Tadema made his reputation within the traditions of British painting. He began his career with medieval and Egyptian subjects and turned to the classical world in 1865, after a honeymoon in Pompeii two years earlier. Alma-Tadema looked explicitly to *The Last Days of Pompeii* with *Glaucus and Nydia* (1867, private collection), a painting illustrating the novel's hero and his faithful servant, while in more general terms, his goal was, like Lytton's, to make the ancient past familiar through an imaginative reconstruction of Roman society. One such exploration of social custom within an archaeological setting is *The Vintage Festival* ([Figure 29.2](#)), which shows a Roman religious rite in honor of the god of wine (Barrow 2001, 50–52, and 2007a, 77–79). A priestess adorned with ivy leaves and grapes leads the celebrants; worshippers follow playing the tibia and tympana; a thyrsus rests against the altar; and finally attendants carry a *liknon* of the vintage grapes. This ordered procession is only one part of the worship; in the background, wilder figures dance and wave tympana in evocation of the riotous behavior immortalized in Livy's description of the Bacchanalian scandal of 186 BCE, which resulted in the official prohibition of Bacchic worship (Livy 39.8–18).



Figure 29.2 Lawrence Alma-Tadema, *The Vintage Festival*, oil on canvas (1870: Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg). bpk Berlin/Hamburg, Hamburger Kunsthalle.

Photo: Elke Walford.

This scene is not generalized, but given a precise locus. The artist places his Bacchanalia in a private house at Pompeii, as we gather from a floor inscription on the far left relating to Marcus Holconius Rufus, identified by inscriptional and statuary evidence as a long-standing public official and member of a prestigious Pompeian family (Cooley and Cooley 2004, 128–129). Another indicator of a Pompeian location is a painting depicting Hercules and Omphale based on a fresco from the House of Marcus Lucretius (IX.3.5). Framed by a priestess on the left and a group of musicians on the right, the painting takes center stage. In a canvas already cluttered with archaeological detail, Alma-Tadema has given the painting particular emphasis. Its subject is Hercules' servitude to Queen Omphale of Lydia (this was punishment for the murder of Iphitus, son of King Eurystus of Oechalia), where he is required to wear women's clothes and work at women's tasks of spinning and weaving (Ovid, *Fasti* 2.303–358, *Heroides* 9). In the painting, Omphale sports the hero's characteristic lion skin and club, while he is plagued by a woman playing a tympanum on his right and a cupid tugging at his hair to the left. Normally an icon of hypermasculinity, Hercules here assumes a feminized role. In a context of Bacchic worship, such a depiction seems to carry a cautionary message, suggesting the cross-dressing Pentheus in Euripides' *Bacchae*, warning against the wilder side of Bacchic worship or even the transgression of traditional gender roles.

Plausible as these interpretations may seem, the same fresco makes an appearance in a very different picture, painted one month earlier than *The Vintage Festival*, and entitled *A Juggler* (private collection, illustrated in Barrow 2001, 49). While *The Vintage Festival* is a socio-religious exploration of cultic ritual, the earlier painting merely shows the idle rich amusing themselves by watching an entertainer juggle eggs. It is tempting to infer, therefore, that rather than having an intended symbolic significance in *The Vintage Festival*, the Hercules and Omphale wall painting, like the inscription to Marcus Holconius, serves as an archaeological

guarantee of the Pompeian past. Both, certainly, are signifiers of historical authenticity and locate the scene in an identifiable time and place. Allusions that are archaeologically specific, however, are not necessarily archaeologically accurate. The actual house of Marcus Holconius (VIII.4.4), situated on the Via dell' Abbondanza, could not have sported such magnificent architectural decoration. Richly painted walls and ceiling, within an elaborate architectural configuration of unfluted green Cipollino columns and ornate Corinthian capitals and frieze: all of this is more suited to grand temple architecture than to a domestic house. Indeed, the Corinthian capitals may well be an imitation of those from the portico of the second-century CE temple of Bacchus at Baalbek in Syria ([Figure 18.4](#)), one of the most extravagant of all surviving Roman structures and far removed from the relative modesty of Pompeian dwellings.

Another manifestation of the Roman Empire beyond Pompeii is the inclusion, in *The Vintage Festival*, of the famous statue of the Prima Porta Augustus, found in 1863 at Livia's villa outside Rome ([Figure 10.7](#)). Like the Hercules and Omphale fresco, the Prima Porta Augustus is depicted in another painting by Alma-Tadema, *An Audience at Agrippa's* (1875, Dick Institute, Kilmarnock, Scotland), where, dominating the foreground, the statue overshadows the "real" Agrippa to whom the title refers. In *The Vintage Festival* the statue of Augustus is relegated to the background left and upstaged by the painting of Hercules and Omphale. Within the hierarchy of art-historical tradition, the statue of the emperor is of higher status than the fresco, but in *The Vintage Festival* it is the fresco that lends Alma-Tadema's scene its identifiable Pompeian character. Alma-Tadema boasted an extensive archaeological knowledge, and his borrowings from different periods and places are not oversights but sophisticated constructions. Varied sources combine to create an impression of splendor and luxury, while references to Pompeii function as authenticating signals of historical time and place. This Pompeii impresses the viewer as a lived totality without actually promising, or delivering, an accurate portrayal of the provincial town and its inhabitants.

In Alma-Tadema's versions, the wall painting itself is in pristine condition and far from the damaged state of the original in Naples Archaeological Museum. It is framed and hung on a pilaster in the manner of a panel or canvas painting or the frescos in Charles' Portici collection. Like the *Antichità* engravings, Alma-Tadema's fresco is retouched, this time with vivid recolorations and added details. The original Hercules and Omphale presents a blue background, while in *A Juggler* it is recolored green and, in *The Vintage Festival*, red. In both of Alma-Tadema's versions the artist includes extra figures and adds white wings to the cupid hovering near Hercules' head. Like the revised fresco, the Pompeii of *The Vintage Festival* acclaims the high-art tradition of the classical heritage: it gives its viewers access to an interior of rich opulence not present in the actual fragments from which it derives its historicity.

Another detail in the same picture suggests that the artist was also aware of the problematic implicit in any reconstruction of the ancient world. On the far left of *The Vintage Festival*, a statue is dramatically cropped at the edge, leaving its visible half unidentifiable. Elizabeth Prettejohn (2002) points out that cropped compositions and cut-off figures were used by French modernist painters around the same date: Manet, Degas, and Cézanne all adopt the practice in their scenes of urban life in contemporary Paris. Reflecting the flow of modern

reality, figures appear caught as if in the frame of a photograph, decentered and fleeting. In *The Vintage Festival*, too, we are presented with a glimpse of a scene: the cut-off statue, the crowds to the right, left, and in the background, and the cut-off inscription in the foreground combine to suggest that something else is happening outside the confines of the canvas. At the same time, the bisected statue functions as another reminder of a modern reality: an antiquity that is fragmented to modern eyes or, more precisely, a Pompeii that has been destroyed, buried, and excavated piece by piece. The retouched fresco signifies unity and a recreated antiquity, but the fragmented statue impinges as a symbol of the incomplete Pompeii and the vanished wholeness from which the picture derives.

The Roman-subject paintings of Alma-Tadema and others extended the fictional-historical narrative of Pompeii from the verbal to the visual. Although widely circulated through engravings and prints, these images were not for mass consumption; they did, however, pave the way for a more popular reception in the form of early cinema: by the time of the first Roman-subject motion picture, *The Last Days of Pompeii*, a 4- to 5-minute film of 1900, audiences could identify a familiar visual code. Maria Wyke chronicles the British, Italian, and Hollywood film versions of Lytton's novel—from 1900 to 1959—all of which imitate and perpetuate the archaeological precision of Alma-Tadema's brand of historical genre painting (Wyke 1997, 158–182). Throughout this tradition, complete domestic artefacts—statuary, furniture, mosaics, and, of course, frescos—provide a recognizable (and livable) Pompeian past.

Federico Fellini

In 1969, a very different cinematic representation of the Roman world takes its bearings from another text set in southern Italy during the early Empire. Federico Fellini's film *Fellini-Satyricon* follows Petronius' notorious cast of characters—Encolpius, his friend Ascyltus, and his boy lover Giton—in their exotic travels. If Adam's room design affirms the reconstructability of the ancient past that Alma-Tadema's complete fresco confirms (and bisected statue questions), for a modernist film-maker any such reconstruction is a clear impossibility. In *Fellini-Satyricon* it is the damaged Pompeian fresco that is used as a symbol of a fragmented antiquity. The whole look of the film echoes Roman wall painting; as Maria Wyke and Joanna Paul point out, the use of Cinemascope produces a wide, flat frame where color, space, and staging imply pictorial imagery (Wyke 1997, 189; Paul 2009, 213). Paul also cites examples of extras wearing "make-up resembling peeling paint from a wall" and framing devices that position characters "against blank expanses of sky or wall" (Paul 2009, 213). Most strikingly, in the final sequence of the film, the script reads: "the plot fills with cracks, is blurred by the dust of the centuries, is transformed into an ancient faded fresco in Pompeian colours" (Bondanella 1978, 19). Both action and characters are frozen; Encolpius ceases to speak in mid-sentence: he and the other characters are transformed into weathered frescos on a crumbling wall ([Figure 29.3](#)).



Figure 29.3 *Fellini-Satyricon*

(dir. Federico Fellini, Italy/France 1969, 02:06:12).

For Fellini, incomplete fresco means incomplete text. The fragmentary nature of the transmitted text of Petronius's *Satyricon* has prompted much academic speculation about its original form. Arguments are put forward for a total of 16, 18, 20, or 24 books in the complete text, while counter-arguments propose that there never was a complete text at all (Slater 2009, 17–20 on the problematic of the incomplete text for the contemporary reader). Alison Sharrock comments: “if the narrative exposition of the original work was in proportion to the extant parts, then it was colossal. Perhaps it never was; perhaps it was always something of a fragment” (Sharrock 2000, 31). In the same spirit, Froma Zeitlin’s 1971 article dismissed the quest for unity and saw the *Satyricon* as an articulation of a disorderly world where (she quotes Yeats’ “The Second Coming”) “things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; /Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world” (Zeitlin 1971, 677). Fellini describes his film in comparable terms:

Our film, through the fragmentary recurrence of its episodes, should restore the image of a vanished world without completing it, as if those characters, those habits, those milieux were summoned for us in a trance, recalled from their silence by the mystic ritual of a séance.

(Bondanella 1978, 18–19)

This appropriation of Petronius by a film-maker makes no attempt to rebuild the *Satyricon*'s narrative, nor does Fellini create a unified narrative of his own; instead, we are presented with unconnected sequences that have the logic of a dream. Fellini borrows from a number of sources, and his antiquity is a conflation of text and artifact, ancient and modern. The dramatic collapse of the insula is reminiscent of cinematic sequences in the various film versions of *The Last Days of Pompeii*. And as Alma-Tadema quotes himself with the repetition of the Hercules and Omphale fresco and the Prima Porta Augustus in different paintings, so in *Fellini-Satyricon* a riderless horse, amid the rubble of a collapsed tenement, evokes Fellini's own *La Strada*, in which a riderless horse mysteriously appears in a deserted street (Dick 1981, 150–151), while the sexualized fleshiness of Oenothea in *Fellini-Satyricon* mirrors that of Saraghina in *8½*.

The weathered frescos at the end of the film echo those seen near the beginning. When Fellini's Encolpius encounters Eumolpus in an art gallery, the artworks are faded and fragmented. In Petronius' text the original Encolpius specifically draws attention to the complete nature of the paintings in front of him:

I even saw works by Zeuxis still unaffected by the ravages of time. And I examined, not without a certain thrill, some sketches by Protogenes, so lifelike they were a challenge to nature herself.

(Petronius, *Satyricon* 83)

Zeuxis and Protogenes are known to us only through descriptions by Roman writers: they are catalogued by Pliny as two of the great Greek artists from the fourth century BCE (Pliny, *Natural History* 35.61–66, 35.101–106; cf. Elsner 2007, 177–199). Fellini shows the Greek works in a Roman gallery through twentieth-century eyes: neither complete nor renovated, but old and broken. Fellini claimed that his purpose was to “restore the image of a vanished world without completing it.” His words suggest that, like the scholarly attempt to recover Petronius' text, or Adam's reworking of already reworked sources, or Alma-Tadema's construction of a Roman Bacchanalia, any search for unity among ancient fragments is a fruitless and misleading quest. In a fully modernist spirit, Fellini confronts any such perception and reception of antiquity, any such goal of reconstructing a vanished wholeness, and challenges the possibility in the act of evoking the vanished world itself.

Mark Rothko

In all the modernist art movements that challenge figurative and representational modes of expression, any reconstructive goal is, likewise, largely obsolete. Yet here too the Pompeian

fresco continues to have a significant impact in the shape of Mark Rothko's Seagram canvases ([Figure 29.4](#)). In 1958, Rothko was commissioned to paint a series of works for the Four Seasons Restaurant of the Seagram Building in New York's Park Avenue. This building, headquarters for the Canadian distillers Joseph E. Seagram & Sons, consists of a 39-floor tower designed in the International style by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, with complementary interiors by American architect Philip Johnson. By the time of the commission, Rothko had developed his signature style: sequences of monochromatic fields on huge canvases where floating rectangles are aligned vertically against a colored ground so that color itself, liberated from specific objects, expresses human feeling.



Figure 29.4 Mark Rothko, *Black on Maroon*, mixed media on canvas (1959: Tate Modern).

Photo: © Tate, London. © 1998 Kate Rothko Prizel & Christopher Rothko ARS, NY and DACS, London.

In the spring of 1959, one year into the project, Rothko took a three-month holiday in Europe, where he visited Pompeii. This trip was documented by his traveling companion, the journalist

John Fischer, who published an account of their conversations in *Harper's Magazine* in 1970. Rothko was particularly struck by the Villa of the Mysteries, a large and elaborately decorated private house on the outskirts of Pompeii. Discovered in 1909, its well-preserved wall paintings were left in situ. The villa is decorated in the Second Style of Roman wall painting, in which architectural elements are used to provide an illusion of depth. The red expanses of walls are separated by sequences of painted paneling and painted architecture. Space is divided into three horizontal areas, while the broad middle field is divided vertically by painted pilasters. During his visit, Rothko spoke of the "deep affinity" that he perceived between these frescos and his own work, describing "the same feeling, the same broad expenses of somber color" (Fischer 2006, 136). The villa's deep red panels separated by black pilasters echoed Rothko's own Seagram vision, in terms of both architectonic structure and color scheme.

The viewing experience itself also struck Rothko as deeply sympathetic with the way in which he wanted his own works to be seen. The artist was famously concerned with the lighting arrangements of his exhibitions. In particular, he insisted that darker colors required subdued levels of lighting. During a display of his works at London's Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1961, he requested that the gallery lights be turned off. The director, Bryan Robertson, described the impact of viewing the paintings on a winter afternoon: "Suddenly Rothko's colour made its own light: the effect, once the retina had adjusted itself, was unforgettable, smouldering and blazing and glowing softly from the walls" (quoted in Breslin 1993, 412). Visitors to Pompeii, likewise, see paintings without the aid of artificial light and, in the Villa of the Mysteries, it is again the red palette that illuminates the internal space.

While in Italy, Rothko traveled to Florence, where he encountered another reference point for his Seagram commission: Michelangelo's vestibule of the Laurentian Library at the Basilica of San Lorenzo. In Rothko's words, 'he [Michelangelo] achieved just the kind of feeling I'm after—he makes the viewers feel that they are trapped in a room where all the doors and windows are bricked up" (Breslin 1993, 406). The darkness of Michelangelo's vestibule was designed to act as a contrast to the brightness of the reading room onto which it leads. Blind windows framed by pilasters and topped with pediments create an illusionistic arena. Illusion is also a characteristic of Second-Style Roman wall painting, but there its function is to create rather than to deny spatial expansion. Windows are not blind, but filled with architectural vistas that lead the viewer to an imaginary outdoor setting beyond the interior space. Even before his trip to Italy, Rothko would have been familiar with another example of Second-Style wall painting in the form of a reconstruction of the cubiculum from the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale, housed at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art (Müller 1994). Consistent with the style of the Villa of the Mysteries, this room is strongly organized by architectural elements of deep-red vertical and horizontal zones. Here, though, illusionistic devices lend depth to a small space: each panel's fantastical architectural façades open up the room to an imaginary exterior (fully illustrated at <http://www.metmuseum.org>).

If Rothko prized the sense of enclosure that he found in Michelangelo's Laurentian library, he could not have found it in the Second-Style Roman cubiculum from Boscoreale. However, his admiration of the Villa of the Mysteries did not depend on its Second-Style design or color

alone. It was the mood of one particular room, Room 5, from which the villa derives its name, that so impressed the artist (illustrated in Gazda 2000). A painting sequence fills all four walls with roughly lifesize figures. Like Rothko, the painter of the Villa of the Mysteries accommodated his art to a particular architectural structure. The Seagram contract did not ask for a specified number of paintings, but instructed Rothko to provide coverage of 600 square feet. It can reasonably be assumed that Roman painters too might be paid by wall space rather than by individual paintings. Both the Seagram canvases and the villa's frescos were designed to fill their respective rooms, but, in doing so, they also aimed to shape their environments. The figurative nature of the wall paintings can even stand comparison with Rothko's abstract designs. He described "the shapes" in his pictures as "performers" able to represent human emotion and to elevate "everyday acts" to "a transcendent realm" (quoted in Harrison 1981, 195).

The depiction in Room 5 of the Pompeian villa is usually interpreted as a Dionysiac initiation ritual, but in academic debate the precise meaning of the iconography is unresolved. Does it represent episodes from the myth of Dionysus? Does it depict the initiation of one or more women into his mystery cult (e.g., Sauron 1998)? Does it record a bridal ritual (e.g., Veyne, Lassarrange, and Frontisi-Ducroux 1998)? Does it imitate a theatrical performance (e.g., Bastet 1974)? Even the question of whether it derives from an original Greek panel painting remains open, and the sequence in which the paintings should be viewed is likewise unresolved. For Rothko, it was not the subject of the frescos or their enigmatic meaning, but the "feeling" (as he described it) of Room 5 that he experienced with such empathy. On its initial rediscovery, the building was known as the Villa Item with reference to the owner of the site, Aurelio Item, proprietor of the Hotel Suisse. The title "Villa of the Mysteries" was coined by Amedeo Maiuri, while director of excavations, in homage to Room 5. It refers to the unrecorded, secret initiation rituals of unofficial Greco-Roman religious cults, but it also serves to make a statement about the strange atmosphere with which the visitor to Room 5 is confronted. In 1971, Michael Grant described the room as possessing a "magic, dream-like, shut-in atmosphere" (Grant 1971, 105). Twenty years later, Roger Ling attributed to it a "curious sense of other-worldliness" (Ling 1991, 104). This is precisely the kind of impressionistic vocabulary commonly used in responses to Rothko's own Seagram paintings, generally agreed to be among his most impressive and most enigmatic works. The artist Gerhard Richter articulated his first impressions on seeing the paintings hanging at the Tate: "It was more an experience about mystery than about painting" (interview with Mark Rosenthal. in Weiss 1998, 363). More recently, art historians Barbara Novak and Brian O'Doherty have characterized the Seagram canvases as "secret, moody, tragic" (Novak and O'Doherty 1998, 270), while Julian Bell, reviewing Tate Modern's 2008 Rothko exhibition, described the Seagram paintings as "a solemn, hieratic monument" that induces feelings of "much foreboding" in the spectator (*Times Literary Supplement* 24 Oct. 2008, 3).

The strange atmosphere of the Villa of the Mysteries' Room 5 and the elusive meaning of its paintings have contributed to a lack of certainty regarding its original function. The room has been variously interpreted as a gendered space occupied by the domina of the house, as a non-gendered reception room, or, most often, as the main triclinium of the villa, which would have

been open to family and guests alike. Rothko's Seagram canvases were also designed for a public dining room, but his paintings, like the room itself, have a less elusive social function. The commission was intended to contribute modernist *éclat* to an exclusive restaurant, but Rothko's own purpose was deliberately subversive. His room was meant to disturb and unsettle its inhabitants. He described the expensive restaurant in the Seagram building as "a place where the richest bastards in New York will come to feed and show off," and explained his paintings as a calculated attempt "to ruin the appetite of every son of a bitch who ever eats in that room" (Fischer 2006, 131).

As soon as it opened in 1959, the Four Seasons Restaurant was lauded by critics and frequented by an exclusive and fashionable clientele. On his return from Europe, Rothko dined there for the first time. He left in a state of rage, exclaiming to Dan Rice, his studio assistant: "Anybody who will eat that kind of food for those kind of prices will never look at a painting of mine" (quoted in Compton 1991, 11). After this encounter with haute cuisine and pampered diners, he realized that his meticulous attention to design, color, and mood would not have the desired impact on Manhattan fashionistas. Rothko withdrew from the commission, abandoned the project, and returned his advance (Borchardt-Hume 2008, esp. 16–24). He kept the completed works in his own possession and then donated nine of the paintings to the Tate in 1969. The rest were later sold to private collectors and now reside in Japan's Kawamura Memorial Museum and the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC.

Unlike the works of Adam, Alma-Tadema, or Fellini, Rothko's paintings make no statement about the prospect of resurrecting the Roman fresco, but his subversive intent against elite patrons instead serves to redirect our attention to the social history of Pompeian art, and the presumed objective of the artist or decorator of the Villa of the Mysteries' fresco cycle. Roman wall painters were craftsmen rather than "artists" in the modern sense of the word. Although Pliny and other writers mention some painters by name, the vast majority remain anonymous. Many would have been freedmen or slaves, usually male, who worked individually or collectively. Room 5 presents a coherent design and consistent features, which seem to indicate that the paintings were by one individual rather than a team of craftsmen. Lawrence Richardson makes the understated claim that the room was "a major effort by a more than competent workman" (Richardson 2000, 26), but goes on to suggest that the workman was probably brought in from Naples, or even Rome, for the job. While it is hardly appropriate to equate a celebrated New York artist with an anonymous craftsman working in a provincial Roman town, the case of the Seagram paintings does invite a comparison between ancient and modern commissions. An understanding of artistic intention here, as elsewhere, may be unattainable, but just as Rothko planned his creation to disturb the Park Avenue diners, is it possible to see this Pompeian wall-painting cycle, its elusiveness, its somber mood, as calculated to unsettle its original viewers? Is its very elusiveness part of the plan? Not a mere accident of lost contexts and learned contestations, but a calculated outcome of visual specificity and semiotic imprecision? In visual terms, Rothko's Seagram paintings may seem further removed from their Pompeian sources than Adam's Etruscan dressing room in Osterley, but it is they that offer a contemplation of possibilities and possible analogies that prompt a reconsideration of the social function—or dysfunction—of Pompeian wall painting as interior

decoration.

In its complicated afterlife, Pompeii and the artifacts within it have inspired many new creative projects. For the visual imagination, it is the Pompeian fresco that has again and again stimulated artistic invention and, at the same time, put a series of question marks against the prospect of reviving antiquity from fragmentary sources. In each of the examples discussed in this chapter, new works are inspired by a series of negotiations with source materials: Adam's interior is based on restored versions of original wall paintings; Alma-Tadema creatively renovates a wall painting himself; Fellini constructs his own frescos based on no particular Pompeian examples; and Rothko uses Room 5 of the Villa of the Mysteries as a starting point for his own aesthetic. All receptions reflect contemporary tastes and agendas, but they also point back to our own relationships with antiquity, and may even lead us to a revised understanding of antiquity; in this case, ancient Pompeii itself.

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Cooley (2003) and Harris (2007) provide detailed information on the history of Pompeii's excavation, and Moormann (1991) and D'Alconzo (2007) concentrate on the eighteenth-century destruction and preservation of Roman frescos, in particular. Adam, Alma-Tadema, Fellini, and Rothko have their own (in some cases extensive) bibliographies, but a small number of publications deal specifically with their reception of Pompeii. While no scholar engages with Adam's Pompeian sources alone, Stillman (1967) examines his Etruscan rooms in detail, and Coltman (2006) offers an exploration of English neo-classicism. Alma-Tadema's *The Vintage Festival* is discussed in my own publications (Barrow 2001 and 2007a) and I give a survey of the artist's relationship with Pompeii in Barrow (2007b). Most books on Fellini offer some discussion of *Fellini-Satyricon*, but Dick (1981) and Paul (2009) focus on classical reception. For the director's own words on the film, see the collection of interviews published in Costantini (1996), translated into English by Sohrab Sorooshian (1997). Rothko's Seagram paintings are discussed in Borchardt-Hume (2008), which provides details surrounding the commission and speculations regarding its non-completion. A more specific examination of Rothko's influences, including Pompeii's Villa of the Mysteries, is found in Bruno (1993). Readers who want to explore further the topic of creative interpretations and appropriations of antiquity should consult Hardwick (2003) and Silk, Gildenhard, and Barrow (2014).

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CHAPTER 30

Roman Architecture through the Ages

Stefan Altekamp

Since late antiquity, the apparently infinite material remains of Greco-Roman antiquity have primarily served subsequent civilizations as an economic resource. At the same time, however, the remains of settlements, buildings, or transportation and supply facilities have also met with undisguised admiration and aroused repeated attempts at revival or imitation. Beyond its rather abstract aura as venerable evidence of a culture that is regarded as exemplary, classical architecture also enjoyed the concrete prestige of technological as well as aesthetic excellence. Since the early Middle Ages, classical architecture has been consistently quoted in a range of different ways. In extreme cases, the exteriors of new buildings have exclusively adhered to classical architectural forms. However, classical architecture has of course never been replicated as a technological, economic, social, or formally aesthetic practice. Divergent cultural contexts reduce the post-antique reception of classical architecture primarily, although not exclusively, to its use in façades. On the other hand, building shells, in this case of classicizing character, inform one's first impression of a construction, and therefore express a certain commitment. Some of the stages of reference or evocation of classical architecture in later construction will be traced in this chapter in chronological sequence, with special attention to the reception of Roman architecture as a specific type of classical architecture.

Middle Ages

The radical reorganization of the classical city over the course of late antiquity led to an alienation from tradition. The well-known fixtures of the ancient city, with its characteristic sacred and secular buildings, were adapted to new requirements that arose out of an altered social balance, demographic shifts, relocation of production, as well as Christianization. Old buildings and traditional layouts were for disposal and often removed, even though imperial edicts in theory and individual preservation measures in practice attest to a certain desire to maintain urban areas that had shaped identities, at least until even this retarding factor got lost.

In parallel to the urban and architectural historicization of antiquity, the classical structures of rulership in the Imperium Romanum dissolved into the medieval world of small states. As soon as power transfers to new holders, mechanisms become visible to consciously invoke ancient Rome through architecture: the incorporation of authentic parts of ancient buildings into new ones (Liverani 2004, 421–430), or the emulation of specific prominent forms of ancient architecture. For the West, the architecture of antiquity was to mean Roman architecture for a long time. The remains of Roman architecture, particularly from the imperial period and late antiquity, were tangibly visible to subsequent generations in Italy and in many regions of western and northwestern Europe; the historical context of this architecture, the Roman Empire, was the model for the empires of the Middle Ages, with the result that falling back on

the architecture of the model empire became a plausible indicator of continuity or renewal. In the Lombard Duchy of Spoleto, the construction of San Salvatore and the Tempietto del Clitunno provided the town of Spoleto with a church and chapel that came astoundingly close to models from the imperial period in their decorative structure (Emerick 1998; Jäggi 1998). In Carolingian representational construction, architectural components were taken from Rome and Ravenna (Palatine Chapel, Aachen) and ancient column capitals were very faithfully copied (Palatine Chapel in Aachen and Lorsch Abbey; Müller 2009). In Romanesque architecture, massive walls, sturdy piers, and round arches were systematized into an expressive and clearly defined style of construction that recalled the characteristic features of Roman architecture.

Renaissance and Baroque

In the Renaissance, knowledge of antiquity began to increase and to be synthesized; book printing enabled the wide dissemination of theoretical analyses as well as accurate images pertaining to the material culture of antiquity. Classical architecture also became accessible in an unprecedented way. For the first time in their long history of use, classical constructions, some of which were more than 1,500 years old, were measured and drawn and the results published.

For the time being, classical architecture continued to mean exclusively Roman architecture, because Greek ruins were almost entirely located in regions that were either isolated or inaccessible to explorers, primarily the Ottoman Empire. The dichotomy of Greek and Roman construction found in Vitruvius as well as the older forms of expression in classical architecture could therefore not be observed for the moment. However, knowledge of Roman architecture was also dominated by a selection of structures, mainly from the city of Rome, that had been established by the most popular and widespread publications of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, among which those by Andrea Palladio and Antoine Desgodetz were the most eminent (Palladio 1570; Desgodetz 1682).

In an environment shaped by respect for antiquity, increased hands-on familiarity with classical forms of construction, critical awareness of architectural theory, as well as a considerable discrepancy between the cultural as well as practical requirements of classical and contemporary constructions, respectively, copying classical buildings was never an option. It was noted with interest that classical architecture in its executed form—at least, what remained of it—often did not correspond to the formal and proportional grammar expounded in the only architectural textbook that has survived from antiquity, Vitruvius' *Ten Books on Architecture*. This book, which was read more as a key to understanding historical features of classical architecture than as the partially utopian doctrine that it really is, considerably contributed to the systematizing approach of the time. It facilitated the development of a classification of building projects based on fixed architectural “orders” with a defined formal apparatus and clear areas of application, without too many disturbances by actual empirical knowledge of classical architecture. Despite the largely classical architectural vocabulary of the Renaissance and the Baroque, the old and new ways of building were largely opposed to

each other, which not only stimulated competition between various contemporary, more or less “classicist” interpretations, but also led to systematic comparisons between old and new, ancient and modern. The variables included different practical ways of dealing with elements of the layout (e.g., all centralized structures had to stand comparison with the Pantheon in Rome) as well as fundamental principles of the vertical layout (closed or open; with straight lines or curvilinear) and the concrete formal repertoire of the architectural orders that adorned the constructions.

Numerous architects sought to compete with the remains of classical architectural orders by producing their own solutions in the classical style, and propagated the contemporary interpretations in richly illustrated treatises. The documentation of authentic classical forms and classicizing creations by Renaissance and Baroque architects circulated in parallel and left behind intersecting traces of their reception.

In an atmosphere dominated by systematizing as well as creative referencing to antiquity, it was an obvious consequence to develop a type of publication that brought together notable alternatives (both synchronically and diachronically). In Roland Fréart de Chambray’s *Parallèle de l’architecture antique et de la moderne*, blueprints of architectural orders by well-known architects of the time were compared with one another as well as with analogous examples of classical architecture (Fréart de Chambray 1650). Even though, by illustrating modern and ancient designs in direct comparison on the same plate, it was the author’s intention to argue in favor of the superiority of classical architecture over modern, the “parallel arrangements” de facto mutated into collections of models that contributed to the narrowing down and canonization of the spectrum of easily available pictorial documentation of real classical architecture. The published descendants of Chambray’s parallel arrangements, which reduced the collection of old and new model solutions to simple sequences without direct comparisons, extensively fenced in the classical references available to “archaeological” classicism in the nineteenth century. It is thus no surprise that present-day reprints of nineteenth-century works provide the handbooks required by those modern builders and architects with more interest in “classical” construction than knowledge of the actual forms of classical antiquity (compare the later discussion).

On an aesthetic level, Roman architecture supplied a formal repertoire divided into orders. Its basic morphology was then extracted from the classical model for the purpose of free adaptation, and given new meaning. As a result, the typological spectrum of the orders was grouped into two main alternatives: the plainer Doric and the more lavish Corinthian order. A derivative of the Doric is the Tuscan order, characterized by columns with a base, an unfluted shaft, and a characteristic collar just below the capital. The use of a volute capital in lieu of a leaf capital turned the Corinthian order into the Ionic; the combination of leaf and volute capitals produced the enhanced style of the composite order. The hierarchy of the orders, based on the functions of the buildings for which they could be used, accommodated a hierarchical understanding of society. The formal apparatus of the most lavish classical architectural order, the Corinthian or composite order, was ideally suited to express the increasing desire of rulers and the church for public representation ([Figure 30.1](#)). Another quality of classical architecture was thus the availability of a style suited to the expression of

magnificence and grandeur. The Doric or Tuscan order was appropriately used on fortification structures, for instance. The historical connotations of the different orders (i.e., how old they were, or where they had originated) were hardly taken into account.



Figure 30.1 London, St. Paul's Cathedral, 1675–1711.

Photo: St. Altekamp.

Yet the prestige of classical architecture was not based merely on its formal qualities. During the Renaissance and Baroque, the technological level of classical antiquity was still challenging; when Domenico Fontana re-erected the Vatican obelisks for public viewing in 1586, the technology that he used to transport and lift them merely equaled what had been commonplace in antiquity. The level of technological skill in antiquity is visible not least of all in the engineering structures built for logistics and infrastructure, which were conspicuously present in the form of streets, bridges, aqueducts, and canals in Rome and its surroundings. These engineering structures were already considered an achievement specific to Roman architecture in antiquity and, in their great utility, were compared by Roman authors, sometimes polemically, to prestigious buildings of Greek architecture with questionable usefulness, for example the famous temples (Drerup 1966). This provided the theoretical debate with some criteria that could be used in the search for further characteristics specific to

Roman architecture, despite the lack of any real empirical knowledge of Greek buildings. Besides its differentiated orders, the high quality of this architecture also manifested itself in the masterful and enduring solutions that it created for practical problems, such as logistics, traffic, and terracing, as well as in a monumental simplicity that appropriately expressed this ingenuity.

In eighteenth-century Italy, this appreciation of Roman buildings escalated into a fundamental dispute regarding the primacy of Greek or Roman architecture. The controversy extended far beyond the superior efficiency of Roman architecture in the utilitarian sector. It also involved questions of chronological priority (which are older, the fundamental achievements of Greek or of Roman architecture?) and stylistic repertoire (which is more lavish?). The polemic involved international scholars of the time, including travelers to Greece such as Julien-David Le Roy and James Stuart, as well as art theorist Johann Joachim Winckelmann. However, in the person of Giovanni Battista Piranesi, a vehement supporter of the Roman cause, the debate also took on a patriotic sheen. What was typically Roman could be isolated from a broader classical tradition, and thus become conceivable as typically Italic (Piranesi 1761; Wittkower 1938).

Classical Greek and Roman architecture could only really be differentiated based on an expanded familiarity with genuine Greek buildings. Starting in the mid-eighteenth century, travel and travelogs took care of this increase in knowledge. Thereafter, Roman architecture lost the privilege of representing classical architecture as a whole. This development was not wholly negative, but had two advantages: being understood as but a part of classical architecture allowed Roman architecture to be more clearly defined in its historical developments, which in turn enabled it to be one of two clearly defined alternatives available for modern reception.

As the reception of classical architecture was differentiated, it developed a new concept used to create distinctions and incite conflict: simplicity. Simplicity now no longer only applied to the architectural forms used to solve the least representational tasks in a hierarchical spectrum. Simplicity was now placed in opposition to grandeur and described a fundamental category of construction that was considered ethically positive. This redefinition of the concept of simplicity was based on a reevaluation of the historical and ethnic origins of the order structure of classical architecture. The orders from Doric to composite now no longer simply formed a hierarchy, but were also distinguished based on origin and cultural background: the simple Doric order arose from the Greek tradition; the ostentatious Corinthian order belonged to the Roman sphere. Simplicity could be made to refer to a fundamental quality of construction reaching back to the Greek tradition, which opposed the hierarchy of ostentatious representation in a way that was critical (of society) and enlightened. The preference for naturalism that was attributed to the Greeks was also carried over into architecture, even though we now know that the Greek order-based architecture came about as a highly artificial construct in the sixth century BCE. In early classicism, artificiality thus became an attribute of the Romans.

In this constellation, Roman architecture became explicit in two respects: as far as its orders

were concerned, it became the antithesis of simple “Greek” architecture and was employed as a symbol of renunciation; it was welcome as a formal basis whenever the mode of simplicity was explicitly unwanted, for various reasons. When it came to engineering structures, however, it claimed true monumental simplicity for itself. In both respects, Roman architecture has remained a source of inspiration and legitimation to the present day.

3 Greek versus Roman

In 1753, King Frederick II of Prussia praised the taste of the deceased court architect Georg Wenzeslaus von Knobelsdorff, who had been trained in the “noble simplicity of the Greeks” (Friedrich II 1847, 38). Looking at Knobelsdorff’s most significant building, the Berlin Opera House of 1742, this praise is surprising given that the layout was closely based on neo-Palladian models and the architectural decoration of the exterior was entirely derived from Roman models. However, the rise of classicism had the effect that stereometric unity and linear restraint in the exterior design could be designated as “Greek,” even when the architectural forms did not show any connection to ancient Greek architecture in the details.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, paradigmatic Greek constructions, primarily from the archaic and classical eras, began to be published, partly in drawings of details done to scale: first the temples of Paestum and those on Sicily, and finally monuments in Greece itself. All of a sudden, it was possible to observe classical Greek architecture in direct comparison with Roman. Classicism was under pressure at the time because it was the first European style of architecture to be confronted with a fundamental alternative; namely, the neo-Gothic style that embodied the contemporary enthusiasm for the Middle Ages. As a consequence, classicism quickly appreciated that it could now draw on two forms of classical architecture as models that were ideally clearly distinct: ancient Greek and ancient Roman architecture.

The classicist strata of European and North American national architectural landscapes make these alternatives clearly visible even today. Without ever being dogmatically divided, the usage of Greek models more strongly characterizes, for example, London and Berlin than Paris, St. Petersburg, or Washington. As it was possible to choose between the different classical models, the concrete decision had the potential to become a matter of political or social commitment. The ornamental forms of Roman representational architecture recalled the stylistic lavishness of absolutism and simultaneously connoted imperialistic claims. In this sense, the preference for Roman models, for instance in Paris (Karn 2000, 87–97) and St. Petersburg ([Figure 30.2](#); Rupeks-Wolter 2000; Raev 2008, 140–146), is tinged with “Empire.” In Germany, anti-French sentiment since the revolutionary wars reinforced the renunciation of Roman architectural forms (which were also considered to be French) and led to a far-reaching identification with Greek models that seemed to be more “primal” and thus more appropriate to the German national character (Bothe 1979). The enthusiastic appropriation of Greek architecture in Great Britain (“Greek revival”) contributed to a certain reserve toward Greek architectural models in the United States, which not only drew on French political models, but also adapted the Roman style of architecture. Thomas Jefferson propagated the Roman-French architectural model as particularly appropriate for the official buildings of the

young American republic (Chaitkin 1979; Höcker 1997; Borngässer 2000, 57–60; Jefferson 2003).



Figure 30.2 St. Petersburg, Russian Museum (Mikhailovsky Palace), 1819–1825.

Photo: St. Altekamp.

In Great Britain (Engel 2000) and Germany (Philipp 2000), Greek architecture was received with particular enthusiasm. However, this process of reorientation was not without resistance. William Chambers strongly polemicized against what he considered to be “deformed” Greek architecture that was allegedly aesthetically inferior to Roman architecture in every significant way (Pevsner and Lang 1948, 276–277). He thought that Roman architecture deserved preference in every respect due to its dimensions, its elegance, and its formal opulence (Chambers 1791, 19). Interestingly, the analogous reservation that Greek architecture does not permit representative monumentality led to the renewed popularity of Roman architecture starting in the 1830s (Salmon 2000, 137–226). In Germany, Prussia was the strongest bulwark of the Greco-centric classicism propagated by Karl Friedrich Schinkel and his school. Yet even in Prussia, social acceptance of the dimensions, façades, and décor of the more reticent

Greek style began to fade in the mid-nineteenth century (Börsch-Supan 1977, 7, 57–58, 197; Suckale 2000). The state and the public shifted their preference to a more monumental, richer architectural style. This also affected the private representation of bourgeois house façades, which had long been bound to a frugal “Schinkelian” template characterized by its preference for clean lines and undecorated surfaces (Bothe 1979, 296; Lübke 1891, 181–184). The original emancipatory appeal of the ostensibly more natural Greek architecture faded in light of the increasing demand for distinctiveness on the part of the restoration-era bourgeoisie.

No stable or consistent semantic system developed from the choice between Greek or Roman architectural models. At first, examples of Roman architecture were available mainly in the form of engravings by Palladio and Desgodetz. In the mid-eighteenth century, Greek architecture began to be analogously documented and the engravings were soon widely disseminated and treated like hallowed icons. The almost archaeological level of knowledge available to classicism from these fresh documentations and comprehensive publications of Greek buildings was eventually equaled by an increasing level of awareness of Roman architecture. Although the number of published buildings did not expand substantially—especially for the city of Rome—their documentation was refined and, following the model of Greek-centered research, enriched by alternative representational conventions. English scholars replaced Desgodetz’s old work with a new atlas (Taylor and Cresy 1821/22).

The known examples of Greek and Roman architecture that were absorbed into contemporary architectural practice became firmly canonized in the mid-nineteenth century. The bulk of architectural finds that were only uncovered later in the course of large-scale excavations thus rarely had any impact on architectural practice. This canonization process was bolstered by the publication of pragmatic “template works,” particularly the frequently reprinted *Die architektonischen Ordnungen der Griechen und Römer* [*The Architectural Orders of the Greeks and Romans*] by Charles Pierre Joseph Normand and Johann M. von Mauch (Normand 1830). In this compilation, Greek and Roman “models” were still consistently united, inviting architects to choose between them. However, the tiered systematization and wide publication of classical architectural orders also marked the beginning of the end of classicism’s prominence. As part of “New Classicism,” the compilations of the nineteenth century were nevertheless to experience a renaissance in the distant future.

An Anti-modern “International Style”

The various architectural historicisms that followed classicism significantly diminished the influence of classical architecture on new buildings, given that later eras were now preferred as stylistic models. In particular, the fundamental interest in details that were established by archaeological research dwindled in favor of more abstract characteristics, such as symmetrical design, use of rows of columns for proportioning or accentuation, framings, or articulated roof lines. The abstracting neo-classicism of the turn of the twentieth century was more interested in the “tectonic” and less in the decorative elements of the classical tradition. Its affinity was therefore with the structurally reduced Greek architecture; programmatic references to Roman architecture were scarce. It should be noted, however, that the

architectural quotations had now become so abstract that a formal distinction between receptions of Greek or Roman forms was often no longer possible. Instead, information about the influences on specific buildings was sometimes obtainable from the contemporary discourse, for instance from publications on architecture.

Radical modernism distanced itself from the classical tradition. However, modernist design was never exclusive and unavoidable, but rather remained one option in competition with alternative models that did not shy away from invoking historical precedence or analogy. The major totalitarian systems of the twentieth century, Socialism and Nazism, rejected architectural modernism and attempted to bring about their architecturally unprecedented utopias with the support of historical reminiscences. The results were eclectic but, in contrast with the starkness of modernism, they once more permitted descriptive detail.

By comparison with the “archaeological” classicism of the nineteenth century, fundamental elements had now changed. Basic principles of classical construction such as symmetry, differentiation of façade elements, or the use of classical ornamental details encountered a much less restricted spectrum of building designs—a spectrum in which oversized designs as well as martial scale took on an important role. To an increasingly high degree, quotations referring to antiquity were thus only “stuck on”; a relationship heralded already by the French “revolutionary architecture,” much of which was never built, but was strongly present in designs of the late eighteenth century (Hesse 2004, 175–176).

In the Soviet Union, the competition for the Palace of the Soviets in Moscow in the early 1930s signaled a shift toward a state-imposed form of neo-classicism that absorbed Greek, Roman, as well as older classical elements in equal measure. The aim behind this eclecticism was to present Russian neo-classicism as the climax of architectural history. Richly crafted details were considered to be aesthetic qualities made explicit, and were intended to emphasize the popular readability of architecture. Elements referring back to the Roman tradition (the triumphal arch motif, among others) thus also served the “triumphalist” aspect of Socialist classicism (Ikonnikov 1988, 197–226; Tarkhanov and Kavtaradze 1992, 54–79).

Officially, Nazi Germany regarded modernism with gruff rejection from the start, but architectural practice remained heterogeneous. By the end of the 1930s, however, state architecture had also embraced an eclectic classicism, if also tendentially a coarser one. In Germany, the choice between Greek or Roman models had had a long and ideologically charged history. The reductionist variant of Nazi classicism could refer back to an alleged affinity that had been propagated since 1800; namely, between “simpler” Greek architecture and a certain German predilection for plain designs. The obvious influence of Roman architecture (enormous domed rotunda, triumphal arches), by contrast, can be easily historicized as an expression of imperial aspirations (Scobie 1990, 5, 34, 109–118; Engel 2007, 221–229).

Italian Fascism

The situation in fascist Italy was complex indeed. The political iconography of fascism played

with classicizing symbols such as the fasces (*fascis*), and the colonialist and expansionist foreign policy claimed kinship with the Imperium Romanum. Fascism did not, however, establish an uncontested cult of ancient Roman architecture. In fact, the modernist impulse would at first not even have dreamed of reviving historical designs; that is, those of ancient Rome. Instead, the architecture of *razionalismo*, a variant of classical modernism, was initially considered a more appropriate expression of the movement's modernity and radicalism. However, fascist urbanism, particularly in the city of Rome, also encompassed the active use of relics of classical buildings. As part of the city's face, therefore, ancient Roman structures indirectly became part of the repertoire of fascist architecture. Urban construction work in Italy in the 1920s to 1940s mainly aimed to make ancient structures visible and isolated. Ruins were to function as icons to be met with universal respect; they were to look like islands in the modern cityscape, being both part of the city and keeping their distance from it. This policy of distance willfully contrasted with the traditional image of Rome, in which contemporary life, although often picturesque, equally often provided a miserable and squalid backdrop for the majestic ruins of antiquity. Assuming a certain distance to antiquity was part of the definition of a strong, new Italy. On the level of urban development, however, the nonetheless indispensable reverence for antiquity manifested itself in a very abstract form, primarily as homage to the ordering and formative power of ancient Rome—a power that was interpreted as an unwavering Italic–Italian characteristic. What was important was not the concrete form, such as the typology of a classical temple or that of a modern representational building, but rather the creativity at work behind the external appearances. Fascist urban planning was not built on a desire to preserve as many local relics of ancient reality as possible or a will to emulate classical architectural forms, but rather on a desire to make the aspirations, power, and authority of ancient Rome tangible in new Rome as an example and an emblem of a closely related historical potential (Altekamp 2011). Le Corbusier summarized this desire for detachment in an interview with the magazine *L'Urbe*, a mouthpiece of the regime, using the following words:

The new age is a new historical situation, but so new that one cannot have any connection with the objects of the past You Italians feel connected with the past through your spirit, but if you want to be modern you must not draw upon ancient forms.

(Muñoz 1936, 32)

In the previously cited examples, fascist urbanism and architecture certainly invoked the organizational strengths of Roman architecture, but left aside its concrete typology and even its visual appearance. Yet fascism's restraint with respect to buildings with classical designs was not absolute. The alliance between politics and modernist architecture clearly weakened in the regime's late phase. Based on a dichotomy between modernity and historicism, late fascism developed a monumental style through important official projects. In a stylized form, this monumental style finally made explicit the architectural affiliation with an ideologically oriented cult of "romanity." The intensified adaptation of Roman architecture in Italy did not reach the level of concretization that had characterized nineteenth-century classicism or other competing forms of contemporary classicism in totalitarian Germany or the Soviet Union. However, it complemented the clear stereometry of modernism with principles such as

symmetry and motifs such as round arches, as well as rows of columns or pillars that unambiguously recalled classical architecture. While an objective observer might see the renunciation of articulated ornamentation as a reference to the simplicity of Greek architecture, any real observer could hardly avoid noticing that the reference point for the grand dimensions, individual forms such as the characteristic arches, and the undoubtedly romano-centric context of the monumental architecture of late Fascism was ancient Roman architecture. The most important and best known of these projects were the buildings constructed for a satellite city, EUR, that was conceived for the world's fair of 1942 and now goes by the name EUR (Esposizione Universale di Roma). The Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana (now the Palazzo della Civiltà del Lavoro; [Figure 30.3](#)), which was built between 1938 and 1943 by Giovanni Guerrini, Ernesto La Padula and Mario Romano, is characterized by several superimposed galleries of round arches cut into a large, austere cube (thus giving it the nickname the “Square Colosseum”). The external appearance of the hermetically sealed structure of the Museo della Civiltà Romana, completed in 1952 by Piero Aschieri, Cesare Pascoletti, Gino Peressutti, and Domenico Bernardini (originally intended as an architectural celebration of the victory of fascism), is marked by long rows of simplified yet colossal columns (Ciucci 1989; Insolera and Di Majo 1986).

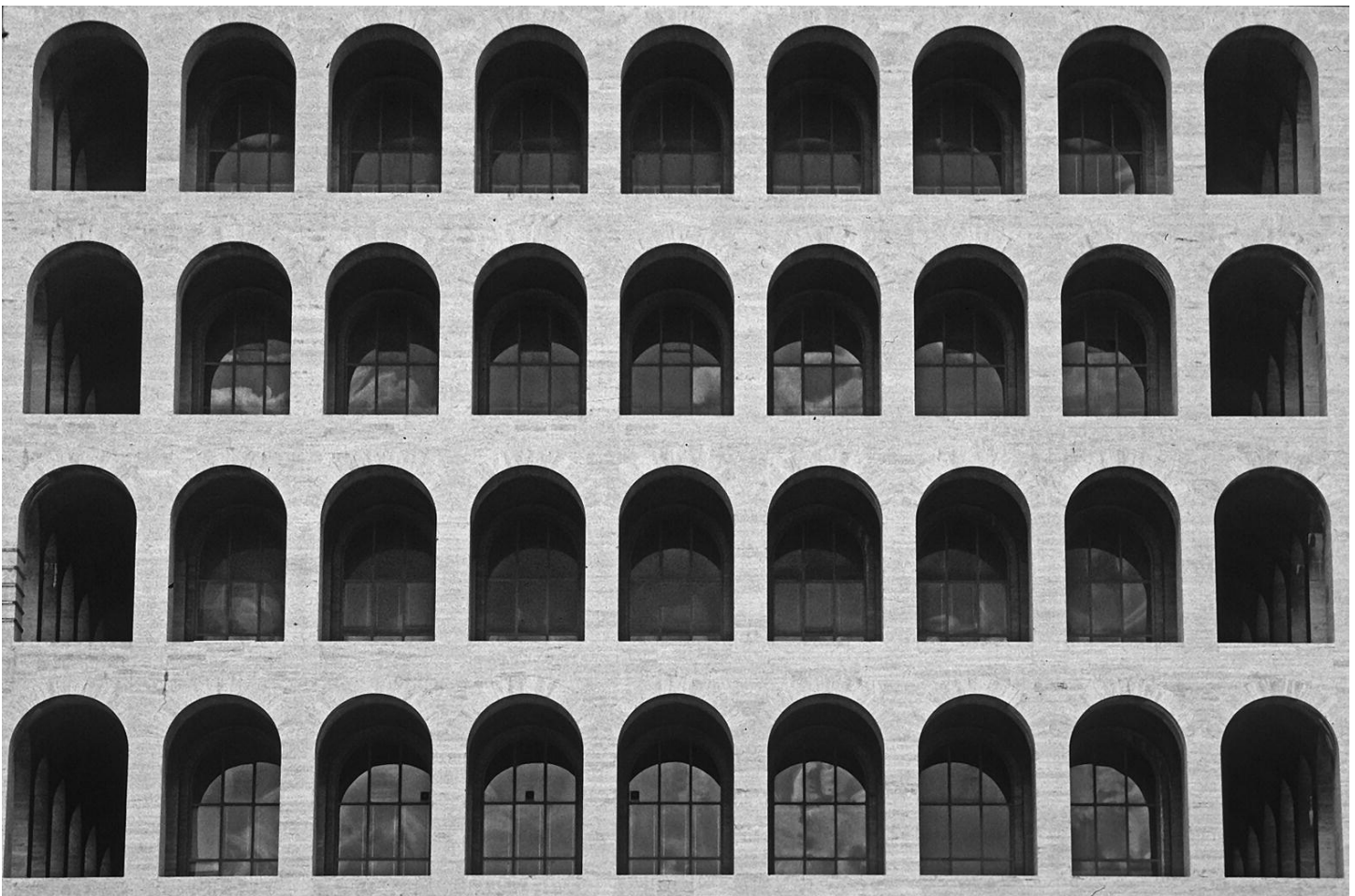


Figure 30.3 Rome, EUR, Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, 1938–1943.

Photo: St. Altekamp.

An unusual case of immediate influence of the results of current excavation on contemporary

architecture should also be mentioned—a reaction that shows the latent readiness to reflect old Rome in new Italy. Early twentieth-century archaeological excavations in the ancient port city of Ostia unearthed the previously undiscovered house type of the multistory residential building. The archaeological discovery suggested a socio-political parallel: the construction of adequate living space for a metropolitan population in antiquity as in the 1920s. The discoveries of the excavation suggested that the way in which multistory houses had been built in Ostia during the imperial era was fundamentally similar to the extensive housing programs planned by the fascist regime for the rapidly growing capital of Rome. Some of the (partly architecturally experimental) housing projects in Rome show clear references to the reconstructed houses of Ostia in their façades (Kockel 1994/95). The analogy is particularly clear in the case of a mixed-use building by Innocenzo Sabbatini in the garden city of Garbatella on Rome's southern outskirts.

“New Classicism”

In the first half of the twentieth century, referencing historical architectural languages allowed architects to distance themselves from the dogmata of modernism. Falling back on traditional designs primarily promised distinguishability in the face of an international style that was spreading all over the world. Yet, these nationalistically or otherwise ideologically motivated desires for difference resulted not in plurality, but in a new preference for “classical” forms. Today, this alternative international style is visible again primarily as an instrument of distinction, as a rejection of globalized norms, standardization, trivialization, but also of equality. Paradoxically, this is turning the adoption of the “classical” style into a reflexive pattern of response and, in turn, into a global standard in itself, albeit a more exclusive one. Nonetheless, one would be wrong to suppose that “New Classicism” was a stringent and unified phenomenon. The palette of possible manifestations ranges from a mere incorporation of certain “timeless” principles of dealing with volume and structure into abstract architecture to detailed quotations of historical orders.

With the advent of modernism, there has been a break with the centuries-old tradition of educating young architects in historical architectural styles. For almost a century, architects (at least in the western world) have thus been largely illiterate with respect to the older history of architecture. Intimate knowledge of historical forms and the capacity to distinguish between essential articulations of the main periods of antiquity or post-antiquity has instead become arcane knowledge not only among the general public, but also among insiders. Hence, a traditional system of visual signals that was able to transmit ethical, cultural, and political connotations along with aesthetic ones has decisively lost its effect. In light of this, the detailed repetition of historical architectural forms and the reproduction of “classical” orders of columns and entablatures have become problematic gestures. Yet when recourse to specific varieties of “classical” forms from antiquity, the Renaissance, or the Baroque are to a large extent, no longer understood, it becomes difficult to bestow any concrete reception of Roman architecture that may differ from other recourse to the “classical” with any meaning that goes beyond vague associations. Even the occasional resurgence of the history of architecture in

university teaching (Dowling 2004, 11–24; Gabriel 2004) will hardly change the situation, because an educated architect needs an equally educated public to understand his or her messages.

This dilemma is linked to another specific characteristic of new architectural practice: the disappearance of skilled craftsmanship. The elaborate formal apparatus of the “classical” architectural language was based on non-industrial skills and production methods. The rejection of “ornaments” in modern architecture, industrialized construction methods, and the increasing cost of labor all contributed to make such craftsmanship unsustainable. Besides the aesthetics themselves, economics has therefore also contributed to shifting the reception of classical architecture to a more abstract level, which in turn decreased clarity over whether architectural references are referring back to antiquity or to older classicisms, to Roman or to Greek architecture, given that the distinguishing characteristics have been considerably reduced in all respects.

Since the early twentieth century, the continued production of detailed architectural decorations in the “classical” tradition has been economically burdensome and semantically misplaced. More recently, it has become possible to scan three-dimensional historical ornaments (such as capitals), digitally alter them, and mechanically reproduce them with a high degree of detail. It remains to be seen whether this technological potential for reproduction in variation will develop its own set of aesthetic laws.

The phenomenon of using “classical” forms as a distinguishing criterion partly reverses the economic argument: an increase in investment without an increase in practical usability also increases the symbolic status of the building in question. “Classical” architecture today is therefore not least of all a means of segregation.

Unlike in previous periods, the reception of classical architecture since the late twentieth century has often been stuck in an economic niche for the reasons indicated, leaving it on rough terrain as far as its iconography is concerned. What does “classical” architecture connote? On the one hand, a rejection of experiments with the new and unprecedented, and an (at least superficial) commitment to tradition and experience. On the other hand, the value of an explicit decorative canon, and hence a concrete commitment to a certain architectural flavor. The high economic investment and decorative efforts necessary finally delimit a sphere of conservative representation. It is therefore no surprise that, despite its emphatic criticism of modernism and its failures, the actual impact of “New Classicism” has been very limited so far.

Headed by Ricardo Bofill, the architectural practice Taller de Arquitectura vehemently fought against the social monopolization of “classical” architecture. In the 1970s and 1980s, the practice undertook several large urban redevelopment projects in France and built social housing in the suburbs of Paris. For this, it used a highly rhetorical architectural language that was based on industrial production and employed demonstrative “classical” formal elements, some of which were massively magnified (James 1988, 79, 119, 186; Jencks 1988, 166–167, 302–304). The simplification of decorative motifs, whose appeal essentially depends on delicacy and variety, resulted in a rather stale monotony. The repertoire of these obtrusively exposed forms also appears to be entirely aimless.

Ricardo Bofill neutralizes possible objections by pointing to his model, namely the classical and Mediterranean tradition that, for him, embodies ageless expertise. The claim of having broken through to the original purpose of architecture, redressing modernism's break from tradition, and having allegedly rediscovered the natural by overcoming the experimental, is typical of the theoretical writings of the "New Classicism." It is impossible to overlook a penchant for self-immunization here. The legitimacy of this claim is very questionable indeed in the case of the very abstract reductionism of Oswald Mathias Ungers, who feels that it is impossible to reject simple geometric shapes and rigorous repetitions because they form the roots of all architectural creation, as is exemplified by Greek and Roman architecture—or so he claims (Lepik 2006). Even classical architecture is neither original nor primal. Moreover, the filiation Ungers would like to claim is probably more of a material, constructive, and aesthetic antithesis.

Yearning for Italy

Since the early Middle Ages, the desire to revive certain characteristics of Roman architecture in new buildings has been primarily fueled by the visual presence of actual classical remnants. Ruins were sought out, described, measured, drawn, and made available as personal memories or in the form of published documentation for various appropriation processes. However, direct encounters with the remains of ancient buildings did not mean time travel into antiquity itself. The relics were found in a spatial context that may have had little in common with the ancient situation other than the geographical coordinates. In addition, they were in a state that was ultimately the result of centuries of turbulent dealings with them, during which their original form had changed, alterations had been undertaken, materials had often been removed, and their usability had been curtailed or even lost entirely. The interplay of both factors (the changed environment and the altered condition of the remains) necessarily influenced the way in which they were received. As a result, the reverberations of Roman architecture were influenced by the situations and transformation processes that its surviving remains had undergone. Italy was the most important environment for encountering a transformed antiquity. Exploration and study of the ruins were therefore inevitably linked to an extensive Italian experience. Viewing the ruins and viewing the country (primarily foreigners viewing a host country) were activities that could not be separated, but rather informed each other. Particularly from the outside, Italy was seen as a country of ruins if nothing else, and vistas and environments dotted with ancient ruins were thought of as "typically Italian."

One consequence of this commingling was the growing number of artificial ruins that were created throughout the European cultural landscape. These structures (mostly) imitated Roman temple architecture, but in an "ephemeral mode" that corresponded to their posterior state vis-à-vis antiquity. Characteristic figures of artificial ruins (e.g., the portico motif or a three-column combination in a row or a corner) were derived from some widely familiar silhouettes of ancient ruins, particularly the Forum Romanum. To this day, they continue to influence the practice of reconstructing archaeological monuments.

The European tradition attached historico-philosophical reflections on the power, size, and

transience of historical empires to the familiar experience of ruins, with the Roman Empire remaining the standard reference point (Volney 2000/1811). From this perspective, the Roman ruins themselves changed what they were role models of, going from architectural models to examples of heroic decay. Albert Speer shared this mentality when he (incorrectly) claimed that the architecture of the Nazi government's state buildings would also achieve the noble look of Roman ruins when they decayed (Scobie 1990, 93–96; Speer 1996, 68–69).

The division between an inner skeleton and its veneer is a common characteristic of Roman representational architecture. The skeleton frequently consisted of concrete or brick masonry and was concealed by slabs of smooth, colorful, and costly materials such as marble. While the valuable slabs were ideal for reuse elsewhere, the core materials were seldom recycled, as they were bound by mortar. Consequently, Roman ruins often appear as cores of constructions without their original coating. Solid brick walls that were rarely visible in antiquity are a familiar sight in post-antiquity because their former covering has been used as spolia. An appearance that an observer in antiquity would not have associated with any familiar usable building has mutated into a key theme of ancient Roman architecture in post-antiquity. As a result, the monumental red-brick wall has become an option for referencing or evoking the Roman architectural tradition. References to this tradition are very visible in the high, sparse brick walls of the Museo Nacional de Arte Romano in Mérida by Rafael Moneo (1986; [Figure 30.4](#)), as the building both incorporates stationary and exhibits movable remains of Roman Mérida in their present state of preservation, and as even its appearance competes with other free-standing remains of Roman representational architecture in the cityscape (Willert 2004, 53–87; Englert and Halbe 2010, 154–159).

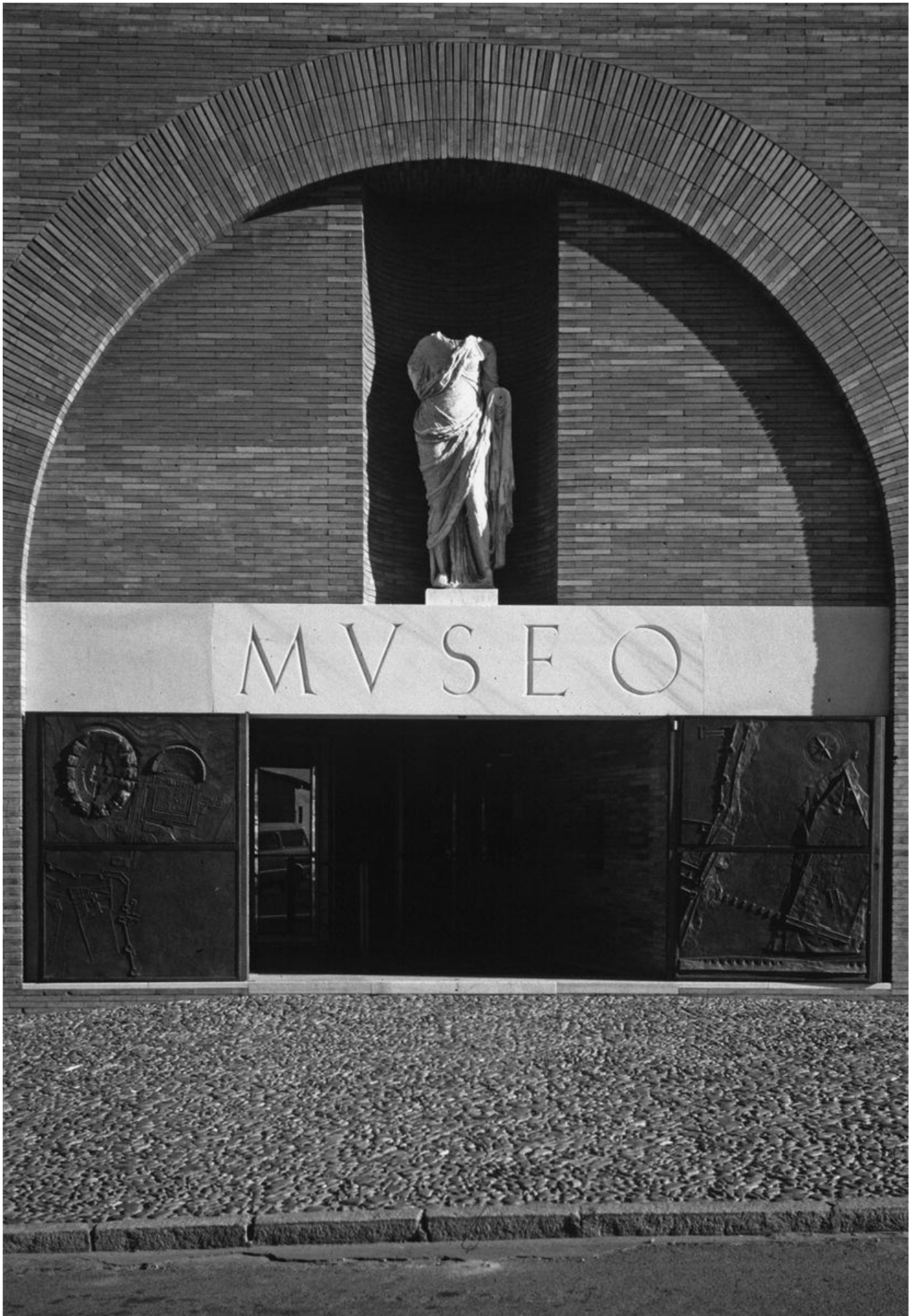


Figure 30.4 Mérida, Museo Nacional de Arte Romano, 1981–1986.

Photo: St. Altekamp.

Ruins and brickwork are individual items in the inventory of the historical landscape of Italy. The analysis here has tried to trace their isolated transfer into alien contexts, but even this landscape itself has been the subject of transpositions.

The Berlin-Potsdam gardens, in the form they had under Crown Prince and King Frederick William IV of Prussia (1795–1861), offer a rural variant of enormous dimensions. Numerous architectural ensembles that refer to models from Italian architectural history are scattered about this blend of natural and parkland areas. Antiquity only forms a subordinated element here. It is present, for example, in the form of (partly immured) archaeological objects (Johannsen 2007).

The Piazza d'Italia, created in New Orleans in 1977/78 by Charles Moore and others, is a highly compressed twentieth-century urban variant that was intended to be a center for the local Italian community. A floor relief in the shape of the Italian peninsula and the quotation of Rome's Trevi Fountain provide clear references to "Bella Italia." The architectural frame that surrounds the piazza exhibits the classical column orders in a mixture of fully articulated forms and post-modern deformation (Jencks 1988, 117–121). The tradition of Roman antiquity is present, albeit in a form that is distorted in two ways: it is the source of the classicist formal apparatus, which is then staged (recognizably and slightly ironically) as a typically Italian backdrop.

From Architecture to Lifestyle

Unlike Greek architecture, the transmission of architectural forms of Roman origin also comprises an ambient component that is not only fed by the physical conditions, but also includes a certain attitude toward life. Today, its traditional appeal has developed into a normative lifestyle and has become the epitome of *benessere*. In the course of this "italomania," individual typological accomplishments of Roman architecture have become icons of an elevated, cultured way of living. Even as functional items that are entirely independent of the concrete architectural form they take, they profit from the aura of their Roman-Mediterranean origin.

The baths were among the most central aspects of the Roman lifestyle. In the urban centers of the Roman Empire, the principle of alternating cold and warm baths was intimately linked to the format of the monumental bath house, which, with its vast halls and many rooms, became akin to a leisure center. This connection dissipated in post-antiquity. Bathing itself survived in the form of Byzantine, Arabic, and Turkish sweat baths, but the extremely expensive, vast bath buildings did not. The remnants of large imperial *thermae* (in Rome particularly the ruins of the Baths of Caracalla, and of the Baths of Diocletian, subsequently converted into the Basilica of St. Mary of the Angels) primarily influenced the architecture of post-antiquity as models for colossal vaulted interiors flanked by enormous columns, but not in their original function as

bath houses. The central halls of these bath complexes, the largest vaulted room type ever to be seen in Roman architecture, influenced the nave typology of Christian religious buildings after the Middle Ages, among others.

The hall architecture of the baths experienced a late revival in the enormous waiting area of New York's Pennsylvania Station (designed by Charles Follen McKim and William Symmes Richardson), built in 1910 and demolished in 1963. It was modeled on the central room of the Baths of Caracalla in Rome, but the dimensions were increased by a fifth. While the size of the ancient model (which was, in fact, surpassed) and its magnificent décor yielded a quantitative gauge of the railway project's ambitions, the visually obvious historical reference to the Roman Empire showed the self-confidence of the nation that executed it. This was no mere reception of a bath house, but rather that of an architectural record that the United States was attempting to surpass (Couper 1912, 71–72, 117; Moore 1929, 273–277; Condit 1980, 279–283).

It was reserved for Fascist and Nazi planners to dream of a revival of public baths in the architectural form of the monumental Roman *thermae*. Vincenzo Fasolo and Alessandro Limongelli, who were among the more tradition-friendly architects, designed enormous historicizing bath complexes for the center of Rome that were never implemented (Scobie 1990, 123–124).

Monumental size also characterized a hall that the architect Cäsar Pinnau borrowed from Roman bath architecture. It was supposed to be built near a new Südbahnhof (south train station) in Berlin along with adjoining buildings, as part of Albert Speer's projects to change the face of Berlin (Fest 1982, 100–103; Scobie 1990, 119–123). Analogous to its historical form, this hall was to house indoor and outdoor pools, but, as is well known, these plans were not carried out either.

The reception of Roman bath architecture appears to have come to a close with these fruitless plans. Roman bathing culture, on the other hand, is more alive than ever.

While the reproduction of ancient Roman bath houses as a formula for grandiosity does not interest contemporary architects, bathing facilities that appear to reference the multifunctionality of urban Roman baths in their range of offerings are becoming ever more numerous. The term “*thermae*” is also becoming ever more popular for these facilities, some of which even bear the names of Roman emperors.

Whereas the size of *thermae* alone already points toward the monumental public sphere, another leading form of Roman architecture is much more closely linked to the private sphere: the courtyard or atrium house. The principle of the courtyard house is not an original phenomenon of Roman architecture, but one that appears worldwide. In western architecture, however, the Roman house, particularly the forms found early in the Vesuvian cities, was the only example for a long time. Thus, the idea that this type of house originated in Rome is very popular. In modern and post-modern house construction, the bungalow courtyard house has spread as a variant of the detached house that harmonically blends inside and outside. Being limited to one story and the preference for a flat roof emphasize an unpretentious way of living

and express closeness to nature. Without having to take up or even be associated with the concrete materials or even the socio-spatial structure of a Roman courtyard house, the modern courtyard or atrium house is an expression of a Mediterranean lifestyle, which is closely associated with the Roman Empire today. It is no surprise that, in Italy, a formal architectural connection to Roman architecture has also been established (Cresti 1986, 101–107; Kockel 1994/95, 32–34).

In Germany, the low courtyard house even entered the sphere of official representation with the Kanzlerbungalow (chancellor's bungalow) in Bonn, which Sep Ruf built in 1963/64 for Chancellor Ludwig Erhard. As a private residence for a head of government, this house type programmatically sent a message of openness and understatement (Körner 1999/2000; Nerdinger 2008, 24–27, 122–131; Schätzke, Warmburg, and Swiridoff 2009).

Baths and courtyard houses in modern and post-modern architecture are manifestations of a transformed perception of Roman culture and the Roman Empire. In addition to the aspects of monarchic and military power, people have become more aware of the private amenities provided by an economic union that afforded peace and prosperity to a multicultural population, and allowed at least the upper classes to develop a luxurious lifestyle that set new standards.

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Campbell (2010) offers a short, concise, and clear overview. Krufft (1994) is a comprehensive, encyclopedic overview of western architectural theory from antiquity to the modern age. For a lavishly illustrated account of architecture and other arts of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century neo-classicism, see Toman (2000). A very influential reference work of the nineteenth century has recently been reprinted as Mauch, Normand, and Rattner (1998), and serves contemporary architects interested in classicism as a guideline. Adam and Brentnall (1990) and Chitham (2005) attempt a synthesis of old and new architectural “classicisms,” while two other lavishly illustrated overviews focus on post-modern classicist designs from an analytical (Stern 1988) and a programmatic perspective (Papadakis and Watson 1990).

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bigio antico

bigio morato

Carrara marble

cipollino

colored
cost of transport
Docimian marble
giallo antico (Numidian)
granite
greywacke/bekhen stone
limestone
Luna *see* Carrara
malachite
nefro
nero antico
onyx
pavonazzetto
Pentelic marble
porphyry
Proconnesian marble
rock crystal
rosso antico
“runaway stone” (*lapis fugitivus*)
sardonyx
semi-precious
serpentine
St. B  at (France), from
syenite
Thasian marble
travertine
tuff
marble incrustation
imitation of
Marcius Tremulus, Q.

Marcus Aurelius

Marius, C.

martyr(s)

martyrdom

Marxism

masks

materials, associations of

- magical/medicinal

- mystical

- contrasting

- cost

- geographic

- historical

- imperial

- metonymic

- mimetic

- with other media

- with social status

- with tradition

Mau, August

megalographia

memory *see also* [commemoration](#)

- political

- through portraits

Mérida

- Forum

- Museum

metalworking, in western provinces

metaphor

Metrodorus of Scepsis

military standards

mimesis

“minor arts” *see also* [decorative art](#) and [luxuria](#)

monopodium

Montmaurin, villa

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dedicatory practice of

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late antique

patronage of

princeps

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Republican

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copying paintings

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domestic

of Dominus Julius

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gold-ground

in non-transitional spaces

in northern and western provinces

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late antique

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non-mythical themes on

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in tombs

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wall and vault

wall painting, relation with

Mummius, L.

Murrhine ware

myth/mythical images *see also individual artistic media*

aetiological

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as exempla

Greek

vs. Roman

in late antiquity

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problematization of

Mytilene, house of Menander

Nebo

neo-classicism

Neoplatonists

Nero (emp.)

as artist

as collector

colossus of

portrait of

Neumagen (Germany), funerary reliefs from

Nicomachus Flavianus

Nîmes (France)

Maison Carrée

novels, ancient, in art

Novius Vindex, collector of Greek art

Nysa (Turkey)

council house

stadium

Octavian *see* [Augustus](#)

Ogulnius, Cn. et Q.

Oplontis, villa of Popaea

opus sectile

opus signinum

Orange (France)

Arch of Tiberius

originality

oscillum

Osterley Park House

Ostia

Baths of Buticosis

Inn of Alexander Helix

Palazzo Imperiale

Otho (emp.)

otium/negotium

paideia

Christian

painting *see also* [pigments](#) and [wall painting](#)

cost of

Greek

historical

Palladio, Andrea

Palmyra

Severan Arch

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patronage *see also individual status groups and persons*

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Paul II (pope)

Paulinus of Nola

pax deorum

Peace of the Church

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Pedrosa de la Vega, villa of

Perelius Hedulus, P.

Perge

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Petronius Lurco, A. *see also* [Trimalchio](#)

Piazza Armerina, Villa of Casale

pietas/piety

pigments

cost of

pinacothecae/Roman picture galleries

pinakes

Piranesi, Giovanni Battista

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Pliny the Elder

Pliny the Younger

Plotius Clemens, L.

Pollius Felix, C.

polychromy *see* [color](#)

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Eumachia, Building of (VII 9,1.67–68)

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Bracciale d'Oro, Casa del (VI.17.42)

Caccia Antica, Casa della (VII.4.48)

Casti Amanti, Casa dei (IX.12.6)

Fauno, Casa del (VI.12.2–5)

Alexander mosaic

Frutteto, Casa del (I.9.5)

Iulia Felix, Praedia of (II.4.3–12)

Labirinto, Casa del (VI.11.8–10)

Marcus Lucretius Fronto, Casa del (V.4a)

Obellius Firmus, Casa di (I.14.4)

Paccius Alexander, Casa di (IX.1.7)

Poeta Tragico, Casa del (VI.8.3,5)

Principe di Napoli, Casa del (VI.15.7,8)

Quattro Stili, Casa dei (I.8.17)

Sacerdos Amandus, Casa del (I.7.7)

Sallustio, Casa di (VI.2.4)

Venere in Conchiglia, Casa della (House of the Venus Marina, II.3.3)

Vettii, Casa dei (VI.15.1)

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Verecundus, shop of (IX.7.1)

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Villa of Cicero, so-called

Pompeius Paulinus

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as social construct

as stand-in for person

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cuirassed

cult portraits

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Italic traditions of

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Ara Pacis Augustae

Ara Pietatis Augustae

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Arch of Gaius Octavius

Arch of Marcus Aurelius, reliefs panels

Arch of Septimius Severus

Arch of Titus

Auditorium of Maecenas

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Basilica Aemilia

Baths of Agrippa

Baths of Caracalla

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Callixtus Catacomb

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chamber of the “Cinque Santi”

Chapels of the Sacrament

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Cancellaria, Flavian reliefs

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Column of Marcus Aurelius

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- Ampliatum Crypt

- Cubiculum of the Good Shepherd

- Flavian Gallery

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Esquiline

- Odyssey landscapes from

- residences

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- round temple in

Forum Julium

Forum of Augustus

- Temple of Mars Ultor

Forum of Peace

Forum of Trajan

- Basilica Ulpia

- Temple of Trajan

Forum Romanum

- clearing off statues

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Grifi, Casa dei
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Hypogeum of the Aurelii
Hypogeum of Trebius Justus
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Praetextatus Catacomb
 Cubiculum of the Coronation
Priscilla Catacomb
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Pyramid of Cestius
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Santa Maria Maggiore
Santa Pudenziana
Tabularium
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Temple of Apollo Palatinus
Temple of Apollo Sosianus
Temple of Ceres, Liber, and Libera on the Aventine
Temple of Claudius
Temple of Concordia
Temple of Divus Julius
Temple of Elagabal

Temple of Fortuna huiusce diei

Temple of Janus

Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus

Temple of Jupiter Stator

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Tomb of the Pancratii, Via Latina

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